CBW

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Show, or no show?

Just a couple of weeks ago, I remarked that there is a palpable reluctance among operators to attend the events organised for them.

I still have no idea whether the problem is the daily workload operators face preventing them getting away from the coal face, whether the events have lost their lustre (or are just the 'wrong' events) or whether the traditional round of seminars, exhibitions and talking shops are gradually being replaced by the internet.

What I do know is that operators at last week's Coach Tourism 2006 exhibition were almost outnumbered by exhibitors. That is not to say there weren't some happy exhibitors and some work done, but I was, frankly, embarrassed for the German hotelier opposite me who sat devoid of human contact for two days, looking along empty walkways.

Talking to friends in other industries, I am told that the downturn in attendance to events is across the board; exhibitions in particular, they say, have become too expensive to attend, especially as an exhibitor. And 'footfall' has been steadily decreasing to the point at which you tend to see few new customers.

The decision to move the exhibition to Coventry's Ricoh Arena next year will, I hope, be the tonic Coach Tourism needs. Much though I love Stoneleigh Park, it is a bit off the beaten track. But I am concerned that it is the timing, not the venue, that needs adjustment.

Over the past five years, there have been some major shifts in the pattern of tour bookings, and operators have seen some usually quiet periods become much busier, and vice versa. Certainly the feedback I have is that in mid-May, many operators are at fever pitch.

Of course, the only way I can find out why YOU - yes, you! - don't go to exhibitions and seminars is to ask. To that end, I would like to know what would persuade you to leave the depot for a day; what, exactly, do you want, and what's wrong with what you have? My contact details are on the left of this page.

Mark Williams

Mark Williams
Editor

Coach and Bus Week is a supporter of the following organisations:

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Bus war builds in Birmingham

'We only need Stagecoach then we can have a party'

Observers are predicting that Go-Ahead's acquisition of the North Birmingham Busways will lead to the biggest bus war yet seen in the UK.

The company's latest acquisition in the city comes soon after it bought the Birmingham Bus Company at the end of last year, and Probus Management in February.

Insiders say Go-Ahead's actions in building a presence in the city is in direct retaliation for Travel London, stablemate subsidiary to Travel West Midlands in the National Express Group, taking TfL-controlled routes away from Go-Ahead subsidiaries London General and London Central in south London last year.

Meanwhile, Arriva is also making inroads into the West Midlands, registering services against local operator Chase Travel in the northern half of the city. Arriva, and Dunn-Line, were also believed to be in the bidding for NBB.

"There is going to be a fantastic time for bus users in the West Midlands," says *CBW*'s source. "This could be the end of the TWM monopoly, because all they have to do is break the TWM travelcard. We only need Stagecoach to come along and then we can have a party!"

Bus users in Birmingham can currently buy two travel cards - one issued by the PTE Centro, and the other from TWM. The Centro card is valid on all services, but the TWM is only valid on the company's own routes. The TWM card is 10% cheaper than the Centro card.

North Birmingham Busways has been involved in a battle of its own recently, with the newly incorporated The Green Bus Company, which operates bespoke school services for the King Edward's School in Birmingham. The resulting battle between the two allegedly saw 20% wiped off NBB's bottom line.

North Birmingham Busways runs a fleet of 25 buses from its base in northern Birmingham. The directors signalled their intention to retire at the end of last year and have been looking for a buyer.

Neither NBB or Go-Ahead have officially confirmed the acquisition although *CBW* understands that a notice to this effect was posted on the company's notice board last week. The sale, due to go ahead on May 24 has apparently now been delayed until after the Bank Holiday. Nobody from either Go-Ahead or NBB was available for comment as *CBW* went to press.

Could this be war? Go-Ahead's acquisition of North Birmingham Busways has laid down the battle lines in the second city

EU bus subsidy ruling 'helpful'

An interesting ruling by the European Union may have a bearing on subsidies paid to bus operators by local authorities.

The judgement follows an EU investigation into payments made by the district administration of Wittenberg (Wittenberg Landkreis), a town in eastern Germany, to local operators.

A statement from the Commission says: "The Commission decided that the system adopted by the Landkreis, namely aid commensurate with the number of passengers carried, and therefore increasing as passenger numbers increase, does not adhere to the principles established in the Court of Justice judgment in the Altmark Trans case.

"Nonetheless, the Commission recognised that the aid will improve the quality of public transport in this region and that the adverse impact on competition would be minimised by recourse to a tender procedure. It has therefore decided to declare the aid compatible with the single market."

Steven Salmon, operations director at the CPT, told *CBW*: "This judgement is interesting and helpful.

"It is yet another facet for the European Parliament and Council to consider in the new Regulation on Public Passenger Transport that they are trying to finalise."

Atco calls for Quality Networks

ATCO, the Association of Transport Co-ordinating Officers, is calling for a system it calls Quality Networks to replace both Statutory Quality Partnerships and Quality Bus Contracts.

A new report by the association, called 'Local Bus Service Provision - the case for Regulatory Reform', says that neither SQPs or QBCs offer the potential to deliver long-term network stability and passenger growth. Under a Quality Network Agreement (QNA), ATCO says that money spent on supported services would be pooled with commercial services to provide the most economic way of delivering services that people need, sharing risks and revenues.

"We want to combine commercial enterprise with public accountability, by combining budgets and agreeing how to develop services in a co-ordinated way," says ATCO chairman John Hodgkins. "Unlike a Statutory Quality Partnership, a Quality Network agreement would provide the opportunity to include specified service frequencies and fare levels in return for a commitment from the local authority to deliver infrastructure improvements over the life of the agreement. This is not a return to regulation but a real opportunity for local authorities to harness the benefits of de-regulation to deliver a co-ordinated and improved bus network."

ATCO believes that its proposals will be acceptable to the OFT, saying a QNA would allow new entrants to the market at specified intervals (providing they meet the entry standards and commit to a minimum of 12 months operation), but prevent short-term competition from low quality services.

£2,000 charge for operators at Glasgow

Operators dropping or picking up passengers from Glasgow Airport are to be charged an annual fee of £2,000 from June 1.

According to local operator, Hugh Muir, a sign indicating the airport's intentions was erected last Friday - and this was the first he, or any of his associate operators had heard of the proposal.

The sign displayed a contact number which Mr Muir says he contacted but has yet to receive any satisfactory reply. He claims he asked about any alternative arrangements and was told 'unlicensed' operators would not be given access to any nearby car parks.

Mr Muir told *CBW*: "It's hard enough

Glasgow Airport: tough on operators

earning a living in this business without this sort of treatment. No-one I've spoken to has heard a word about this and we're all very annoyed. If you are in and out of the airport several times a week it perhaps isn't a lot of money, but if you only get airport jobs now and again it will make the seat prices uncompetitive.

"I get the feeling they would like to stop coaches and minibuses altogether. This would force air passengers to use their cars and pay the high prices in the long and short-stay car parks. When I was told we couldn't even use car parks some distance from the terminal I asked if they thought I was supposed to drop passengers on the motorway. The response was 'that's up to you'."

CPT Scotland is currently investigating the situation, having already received a large number of calls from its members. However, until they have checked the details fully they are not in a position to make any comment.

Stagecoach network a hit

Stagecoach says its new-look network in South Yorkshire is already proving a hit with passengers, reporting that sales of its travelcard have jumped by nearly 80% in the first month.

Stagecoach launched a new integrated bus and tram network in Sheffield in early May under the slogan 'By Bus, By Tram, Buy Just One Ticket', which includes increased frequencies on the major routes and an aggressive pricing policy. Sales of its weekly Megarider ticket, valid on both buses and trams, have jumped by 77% following the introduction of the new services.

This week, the company is also introducing a 50 pence maximum single promotional fare on two of its seven major routes in the city.

The changes follow the acquisition by Stagecoach Group in December 2005 of Traction Group, which included Yorkshire Terrier services, now rebranded in Stagecoach colours.

Stagecoach says its fares are up to 40% cheaper than those charged by First, which currently has more than 80% of the bus market in Sheffield.

Surface transport to be included in carbon trading scheme

After successfully lobbying the European Union to bring aircraft emissions into its new carbon trading scheme, the British government will now press for surface transport to be included as well.

The Department for Transport Annual Report 2006, published last week, says: "Drawing on the work we have already carried out, we will engage with key stakeholders, the European Commission and other EU Member States to help develop a robust evidence based on the costs and benefits of including surface transport in CO_2 emissions trading at an EU level."

Emissions trading works by allocating companies a quota of emissions that reduce year-on-year. Companies which emit more than their allowance can buy certificates from those that emit less, thereby ensuring that emissions reductions are achieved in the most cost-effective way.

The report sounds an optimistic note on bus usage in the UK. The DfT has a Public Service Agreement target to grow bus and light rail use in England by 12%, with growth in every region, by 2010. In 2004-05 patronage rose by just 1%, leaving the government relying on growth in light rail (8.25% increase in 2004/05) to achieve its target. However, its says: "Slight increases in patronage in two regions (South East and South West) may suggest that a corner has been turned."

The report also includes a reminder about an alternative way to gain approval for a quality contracts scheme, saying: "The Railways 2005 Act includes a provision applying different criteria for the approval of quality contracts schemes where they are linked to the reduction of rail services and their replacement by bus."

Briefly

Seven people were believed killed, and 26 injured, after a coach overturned in southern Spain at the weekend. The Belgian vehicle, owned by Vilade Travel, was on its way from Tangiers to Belgium with mainly Moroccan passengers on board when it hit a tree, had the roof ripped off and overturned into a ditch. The driver tested negative for drugs and alcohol and the tachograph shows the coach was not speeding. Police are investigating.

First has apologised to a disabled customer in Somerset after he was unable to board a bus because the driver did not know how to use the ramp. A spokesman says the company will retrain all its 900 drivers in the next four to six weeks to ensure it does not happen again.

Peter Hendy, David Martin, Arriva chief executive, and Mark Yexley, managing director of Arriva London, turned out on Tuesday for the re-opening of Arriva's Edmonton depot. Wolfgang Presinger, executive managing director of Mercedes-Benz Buses and Coaches, was also on hand to deliver the 390th Citaro 'bendy bus' to be delivered into London. Full story and pictures next week.

TfL will relocate its offices to the new Shard of Glass building in London Bridge when it is completed. Billed as Britain's Tallest Building, it should open by the end of the decade.

The local government elections in early May have reportedly put the new tram system planned for West London under pressure. All three councils along the £650m tram route turned Conservative at the election. One new councillors is quoted as saying: "TfL needs our cooperation, but we are going to become aggressive opposers to the scheme."

BUSES

Built by East Lancs, bought by Stagecoach. Total cost: £1 million

East Lancs wins £1m Scottish Euro IV order

Stagecoach contract is huge boost for coachbuilders

Stagecoach has placed its first-ever order with East Lancashire Coachbuilders, for nine 43-seat Euro IV buses on MAN chassis.

Based on the MAN Lion City model, using the Neoman 18.240 chassis and engines fitted with exhaust gas recirculation to achieve Euro IV emissions levels, the vehicles have a striking new design and interior.

The £1 million project has been part-funded by Strathclyde Partnership for Transport. The buses will be introduced on Stagecoach's Ayr-Girvan-Stranraer service from September this year. Les Warneford, managing director of Stagecoach UK Bus, said: "This is our first order with East Lancashire Coachbuilders and will ensure we have access to an even wider range of high-quality vehicle suppliers. We have invested more than £150million in new vehicles for the UK over the past three years as part of our drive to make our operations greener and attract more people to public transport. Our joint initiative with Strathclyde Partnership for Transport will deliver a step-change in the travelling environment for our passengers in Ayr, Girvan and Stranraer."

East Lancs sales director John Horn said: "We are delighted to have been given this opportunity to work with Stagecoach and securing this business is a real feather in our cap. Since our mbo last year, we have secured significant new business and we have established East Lancs as a mainstream supplier to the larger UK bus groups."

The announcement comes only three months after Stagecoach placed £50 million of orders with four other vehicle manufacturers for more than 460 new buses for the UK. Stagecoach's Barrow depot currently operates a number of vehicles manufactured by East Lancs, which were ordered by Cumbria County Council. However, the new buses are the first ordered directly by Stagecoach to its own specification.

London's voice

Emma Hignett, the local radio DJ whose voice was being trialled as the announcer on London's buses, has been given the job after 99% of passengers said she was right for the job.

Ms Hignett's voice was trialled for eight weeks on the 149 Arriva London Bridge-Ponders End bendy-bus route. Over 90% of respondents said the new information improved their journey.

She will now start recording nearly 30,000 different announcements for use on London's 700 bus routes. She said: "It would be great to think I might soon be as much a part of London as 'mind the gap'.

Ms Hignett previously worked for London's Capital Gold and Jazz FM radio stations, but now works at Darlington's Alpha FM. The audio announcements are an integral part of the iBus project, which will use GPRS technology to track every bus in London and prompt the system to make the relevant announcements. The system will be fully operational in summer 2007.

DJ Emma Hignett

Looks pretty good in daylight, doesn't it? But just wait until nightfall...

Warrington's new look glows in the dark...

Warrington Borough Transport has unveiled a bright new look to coincide with the opening of the town's new £5m bus station.

The familiar red and cream colour scheme remains, but now also features a new paint layout and an orange sweeping design on vinyl panels that will glow at night.

The company has re-named its services "Network Warrington" to promote the fact that the company offers a comprehensive, easy to use, network covering the whole town.

Customer surveys conducted by the company revealed an extremely positive reaction to the new livery and brand name, with approval rates in excess

Union praise for 'sensitive' redundancies

The TGWU says that the redundancies recently announced at new Stagecoach subsidiary Yorkshire Traction have been handled sensitively.

Forty-three members of staff have accepted voluntary redundancy at the Sheffield Road depot in Barnsley, which will now close. A TGWU spokesman said: "Those who wanted to stay have been able to and those who wished to leave have received their full notice and redundancy pay. It has been handled in a sensitive way."

of 90%, although overwhelmingly the customers wanted the town crest to stay on the design.

"They placed immense value on the fact that the borough council retains ownership of the company," says WBT managing director, Nigel Featham. "They were keen to see the links reflected in the new livery."

"Although we wanted something new, we didn't want to let go of the traditions. The new livery sends out the message that the buses are modern, easy-to-use and good value."

The new image comes on the back of major investment in the bus fleet, which has seen 58 low floor single deckers taken into the fleet in the last five years, and the installation of a network-wide Real Time Passenger Information System in partnership with Warrington Borough Council.

Ten buses with the new livery have already entered service and the rest of the 125-strong fleet will gradually be updated as they come in for their regular repaint. The new design is expected to last well into the next decade.

NCT staff on strike

Nottingham City Transport is facing strike action by drivers after pay talks broke down between the company and the TGWU.

The drivers will strike on Saturday May 27, and possibly again on June 3, if the issue is not resolved. NCT has withdrawn all non pre-allocated overtime in a bid to stop drivers recovering their salaries through time lost on strike.

Drivers overwhelmingly rejected a 2.4% pay increase - 0.3% above the rate of inflation, and the seventh consecutive above-inflation rise at the company.

This would equate to a 20p per hour rise, and £8.77 per hour for drivers of big buses.

NCT told its drivers that any rise above this level would have to be met through increased productivity to stop the increase being passed on to customers.

NCT managing director Mark Fowles told *CBW*: "NCT provides one of the best salary packages on offer to bus drivers outside London.

"The company cannot afford to offer more this year, as any rise above this level would require either an increase in fares or cuts in services, which we believe is not acceptable to our passengers."

Other sources at the company tell *CBW* they are mystified as to why the drivers are taking such a hard line. "They're like Oliver Twist - they just want more," said one.

The union says it just wants a "fair deal".

In a piece of better news, NCT has announced an order for the first UK tri-axle Scania Omnilinks. The Euro 4 buses will be used on NCT's growing services to a recently built industrial estate in the city, and will be delivered next March.

■ Wilts & Dorset drivers have rejected a 15% pay increase over four years, and a reduction in the working week for no loss of pay, and have also voted in favour of industrial action. They walked out for 24 hours on May 18 and will strike for 48 hours on May 25-26.

Good news for Nottingham: tri-axle Scania Omnilinks on order

Briefly

■ **Kent County Council has unveiled a £1.4m plan to improve bus services in the east of the county. New buses, routes and timetables are being introduced between Dover, Deal, Sandwich and Canterbury, with improvements to bus stops and waiting areas planned.**

The project is a partnership between the county council, Dover District Council and Stagecoach.

■ **A 27-year-old woman has died after being hit by a bus in central London. The vehicle reportedly ploughed into traffic lights before hitting the woman, who was standing on a pedestrian island on Southampton Row. She suffered multiple injuries and died at the scene. Police are appealing for witnesses. The driver was treated for shock.**

■ **Guernsey's night bus services are back on track after the "minor technical problems" that led to the temporary suspension of operator Universal Limo's licence were resolved. The route runs from St Peter Port to St Samson's from 21.00 – 02.30, Fridays and Saturdays, and is expected to be extended to St Martin's in the near future.**

■ **The Polish driver of the Chumleigh Tours bus that crashed in January killing a young woman has been charged with causing death by dangerous driving. The driver appeared before Exeter magistrates last week. He has been bailed to appear again on May 26.**

■ **A bus driver in Mold, North Wales, faces an anxious wait after a passenger stabbed him with a syringe. The attack happened on the Arriva Cymru-operated number 26 Wrexham-Mold service. The passenger was apparently trying to steal money. The driver received an arm puncture wound before managing to push the man off the vehicle.**

COACHES

Tourism show 'disappointing' say exhibitors

New look and new venue confirmed for next year's Coach Tourism show

Billed as one of the biggest events of the year, last week's Coach Tourism 2006 show was a damp squib for many standholders.

Owned by the British Association of Wholesale Tour Agents, the show at Stoneleigh Park, Warwickshire, utilised about half of a relatively small hall. Attendance had dropped in 2005 and a new exhibition organiser was drafted in to help boost the event this year.

The event organisers were claiming 300 people attended the first day - more than the total attendance over two days last year. But most standholders *CBW* spoke to reported a quiet two days. Official figures for attendance were due to be released at the end of this week after approval by BAWTA.

"The footfall was appalling," claimed City Sightseeing's international sales and marketing manager Graham Toome. "We were very disappointed. Most of the people we saw we already knew. We had a couple of useful networking opportunities with exhibitors, but it was one of the worst shows I've been to.

"It was our first year, so we have no benchmark, but we really didn't expect it to be as quiet. It was so bad, I sent one staff member home."

"The show was well-attended by exhibitors," quipped ACE Promotional Travel's MD Maurice Jasper. "What a shame. There were not an awful lot of buyers. A lot came for a particular reason - to see old contacts or go to the dinner the first evening. But the contacts we made didn't justify attendance."

Philippe Maree, trade manager of the Belgian Tourist Office said the show lived up to his low expectations: "We are not sure if we will attend next year, but the organisers have said it will be better. At the dinner afterwards, attended by 300 people, I spoke to a few coach operators who said they had not been to the show and wouldn't be going the next day."

Not all exhibitors were negative. Dunoon and Fort William reported another productive show. Managing director, Harjinder Shergill told organisers: "We've had a great show once again. We will definitely be back, and we're even considering a bigger stand. If the show is to improve, it's up to the organisers to talk to operators."

One coach operator who attended said the timing was to blame: "Organising anything in mid-May is unhelpful," said the Home Counties operator. "There are just too many things going on."

The operator said the main reason for attendance was a nomination at the coach tourism awards on the first evening of the show, at Coventry's Ricoh Arena: "Asking people to attend a long evening event when they have either been manning a stand or going round a show all day isn't ideal. We could only spare one person for the event."

Sean Taggart, chairman of the show's owners, BAWTA, said his own stand was busy, and that it depended on who you talked to: "The industry needs an event at this time of the year. We took hour-long appointments with our visitors, and the organisers tell us rebookings are encouraging. We had 300 attend the first day, which is as many as in 2005. Coach Tourism is about the quality of buyers, not the number."

Mark Williams, editor of *CBW* which had a stand at Coach Tourism, said timing is the major issue:"The big spring group travel event is British Travel Trade Fair in March or April. After that, operators are in top gear. If there was a need for a second show, maybe it would be a winter event held around November or early December." That timing seems to work for the World Travel Market."

Coach Tourism 2007 will take place on May 16-17 at the Ricoh Arena.

Johnsons Coach Travel won awards for UK Holiday Programme of the Year and Day Excursion Programme of the Year

THE WINNERS

- Coach Tourism Wholesaler of the Year **Albatross**
- Coach Tourism Cross Sea Carrier of the Year **SeaFrance**
- Coach Tourism Town/City of the Year **York**
- Coach Tourism UK Attraction of the Year **Drayton Manor**
- Coach Tourism Accommodation Provider of the Year **Marriott**
- Coach Tourism European Attraction of the Year **Disneyland Resort Paris**
- Coach Tourism Ticket Supplier of the Year **Group Line**
- Coach Tourism UK Holiday Programme of the Year **Johnsons Coach Travel**
- Coach Tourism Day Excursion Programme of the Year **Johnsons Coach Travel**
- European Holiday Programme of the Year **Lucketts Travel**
- Brochure of the Year award **Parry's International**
- Manager of the Year **David Smith, Independent Travel**
- CDC Coach Driver of the Year **David Wilde, Edwards Coaches**
- COACHmonthly special award **Gerry Topiol**

Heathrow permits: deal brokered

Operators bound for Heathrow have had a swingeing increase in charter permits on to the airport reversed thanks to eleventh-hour action by trade associations.

The London Tourist Coach Operators Association and the Confederation of Passenger Transport stepped in when BAA Heathrow proposed a 60% increase which would have pushed the permit price well beyond £10. After meetings with BAA, a 5% increase to £8.40 plus VAT was agreed and negotiations have started over other increases.

"The announcement of significant increases to permit prices just weeks prior to the proposed implementation would have been a major problem for operators," said

London set-down nightmare

A Kent operator says he's so fed up with getting parking tickets at London's Science Museum and elsewhere, he's considering dropping work into the capital.

John Martin, proprietor of Plan It Travel near Sevenoaks, said the latest incident saw three vehicles setting down primary school children booked: "I have to let them off where it's safe, and we were there no more than two or three minutes.

"The coaches were booked as they went to pull away, with £80 parking tickets. I also had a fine the other day from a CCTV camera image. It's getting so bad it's not worth my while running schools and elderly groups into London."

The Confederation of Passenger Transport's coach parking consultant Bob Pilbeam said Plan It's is a known problem: "This relates to the bays on the Red Route which runs past the Science Museum," he said.

"The problem is that there are a limited number of set-down bays, and if they are in use, drivers use the road. I have argued that the traffic wardens should first ensure the bays are being used properly, and move along anyone parked there, before ticketing coaches queuing for the bays.

"But Mr Martin has a point. Do you leave children hanging around on the side of a busy road if you can't reach the pick-up bay? I suggest that operators use Exhibition Road instead of the A4 Cromwell Road."

Sandy Martin, managing director of Flight Delay services, part of the Excel Group, is presented with the keys to one of the company's two new MAN Ayats from sales director Paul Montague. The vehicles will be split between the company's sites in Stansted and Manchester airports. The vehicle shown is a 14m 80-seater decker, with a half mega loader storage. It is powered by a MAN 460bhp engine with a 12 speed auto ZF AS-tronic gearbox. Other features include ABS, ASR, air con, toilet, CCTV with reversing camera, DVD player with 5 monitors, tables in lower saloon, fridge, and tea and coffee facilities. Excel also has a new livery, designed by Visual Reality of Braintree, Essex.

LTCOA chairman Stephen Telling. "This deferment gives the industry and BAA time to work towards ways of achieving mutual objectives."

Telling warned that this didn't mean the new price was pegged beyond November, but said the dialogue had resulted in a workable compromise.

"We're happy with the concession agreed today [Monday]," said Allan Edmondson, head of coach services at CPT. "There's still work to be done but the offer to work closely in partnership with BAA is great news."

Mills in the dock again

The wife of a former leading coach firm proprietor stole £20,000 to help her husband pay debts of £40,000 after his business went bankrupt.

Linda Mills, aged 57, stole the £20,000 as treasurer of the Lower Gornal British Legion Club, near Dudley, where her husband Robert Mills, who owned Bob Mill's Coach Travel in Lower Gornal, was a member, Wolverhampton Crown Court was told.

The firm became bankrupt in January last year after Mr Mills had been fined £1,200 with £8,592 costs in 2004 after admitting six offences of making bogus applications for vehicle licences. The case left Mr Mills and his business in financial ruins. The firm's licence had been revoked following a West Midlands Traffic Commission inquiry. Mrs Mills will be sentenced at a later date.

Briefly

Following intensive negotiations Neoplan Bus has decided to sell the Neoplan site in the Vaihinger Strasse in Stuttgart-Möhringen to the Haussler Group. Last summer Neoplan Bus announced production in Suttgart would cease and the departments at the location would be relocated in stages up to the end of 2007. Haussler Group plans to turn the 32,000 square metre site into a housing development for several hundred flats as part of a £70m development programme beginning in 2008.

Sanders Coaches in Norfolk has submitted a planning application to redevelop its Fakenham depot site for housing. It will look for a smaller base. The company has been operating since 1975 and has its headquarters in Holt.

Work on a new £2.5m bus and coach terminal has started at Stansted Airport. The new Public Transport Interchange (PTI) has been designed by Foster and Partners architects who were responsible for the original Stansted airport building in the 1980s. The building will feature an overarching canopy made from similar materials to the Eden Project in Cornwall, additional ticket desks, a 136 seat waiting room, coffee bar and RTPI information.

Operators taking fans to the World Cup tournament in Germany this summer are advised to consult the following website for details of the arrangements at the various venues: *http://yourway.fifaworldcup.com/4.html?&L=en*.

Operators visiting the shopping centre at Canary Wharf in London – the second largest inside the M25 – should contact Paul Thomas at Canary Wharf Group PLC on 020 7418 2622. He can arrange parking, and for the coach to enter the security zone to set down and pick up. The coach registration number, and 24 hours notice, needs to be given.

Briefly

A walking school bus is on trial in Dundee. Volunteer adults, police and members of the city council accompany the children one day a week at present, but the scheme is expected to expand to daily runs, and then to other schools in the area too, if successful.

A school driver under investigation for child pornography offences has died in a car crash.

Maurice Fenwick, 64, from Colburn, North Yorkshire, was accused of taking indecent photographs of a 12-year-old disabled girl in his care.

His car left the road and collided with a tree. No other vehicles were involved.

Primary schools across Merseyside are being invited to apply for an end-of-term visit from a bus full of soccer experts from Everton football club.

Arriva has joined forces with the premiership club to provide the day of coaching and information on fitness for Year 6 pupils, on July 7.

An angry parent in Swindon, Wiltshire, says her confidence in the school bus system has been shattered after her four-year-old son was left stranded.

He had been dropped off a mile from his home by an inexperienced driver.

The driver inadvertently missed out a section of the route, leaving the boy and a 10-year-old girl stranded. The boy made it home 45 minutes late, carrying a dandelion to say he was sorry.

A Scottish secondary school has kicked up a fuss after some of its pupils heading for an exam were not allowed to board a bus because they did not have their passes with them.

But Marshalls Coaches of Baillieston claims the pupils were given plenty of notice.

Robin Marshall insists: "This is something we do sporadically and Bannerman High is the only school we have a problem with."

Irish school bus fire prompts action

Government intervention follows latest incident

Irish Transport Minister Martin Cullen has announced an immediate and fully independent review of the inspection regime for Bus Éireann school buses following a series of accidents and incidents on the school fleet over the past year, culminating in a narrow escape for 32 children in Co Meath when their bus burst into flames.

"I have instigated a full independent review of systems and how they're carried out as well as maintenance management, the criteria that's laid down from my department, and how the companies are licensed," Cullen announced. "This will make sure we have best practice and ensure that all of our fleet is to the highest standard."

The announcement followed comments by Taoiseach Bertie Aherne that the number of accidents on the school fleet in the last year was "worrying" and that the system whereby Bus Éireann was responsible for overseeing safety and roadworthiness checks on its own fleet gave cause for concern.

"A system where an individual can both fix a bus and do its DoT examination does not apply in other areas," Mr Ahern told the Irish parliament.

The Taoiseach dismissed opposition claims that the high age of the school fleet was the root cause of the incidents, stating that the condition of the vehicle and not its age was the real issue.

The incident near Athboy in Co Meath involved an 18-year-old Bus Éireann vehicle, which burst into flames and was completely destroyed while carrying children to a local school.

The blaze was so severe that the fire service had to dampen down a nearby building to prevent it from suffering heat damage.

The vehicle involved, an Alexander-bodied Leyland Tiger coach, had been serviced within the last 24 hours, having broken down on the same school run the previous day.

It is the second Bus Éireann school vehicle to be destroyed by fire while in service during the last 12 months.

The incident came just 24 hours after a child was injured in Co Monaghan when he fell through the emergency exit of a Bus Éireann school bus near the village of Orum. The company say that this vehicle was fitted with seatbelts, and that safety systems were functioning correctly.

Gardai and Bus Éireann have launched investigations into both incidents.

Parents losing confidence in the system, says McEntee

Fine Gael road safety spokesman, Shane McEntee, has said he has little confidence in the Taoiseach's commitment to improve safety levels on Bus Éireann school vehicles, after he learned that no-one in Government has bothered to contact Bus Éireann.

"Parents across the country are rapidly losing faith in the ability of the school bus fleet to get their children to and from school in safety," he said. "First we heard about a school bus carrying 32 children in Meath which exploded in flames, a day after being repaired. Now we hear that a child fell from a school bus in Monaghan. Parents from across the country have been calling me to express their utmost concern about school transport.

"The litany of accidents involving school buses in the last year prompted Fine Gael to call for an independent audit of Bus Éireann's vehicle testing systems this week. The Taoiseach told the Dáil that he supports such an audit.

"However, when Fine Gael contacted Bus Éireann today (Thursday, May 18), they confirmed there had been no formal communication from the Government concerning an independent audit. I am concerned that the Taoiseach might be talking about an internal audit which is already being conducted by Bus Éireann, and which is far from independent.

"The Taoiseach and the Government have a responsibility to ensure that no child is ever again placed in a position of danger on a school bus. But it looks like the Taoiseach's commitment to improve safety levels on Bus Éireann vehicles is just another empty promise."

CT Plus adds more routes

THE newest entrant to the West Yorkshire school bus scene, CT Plus, stepped up its operations this week, with the introduction of five new services designed by West Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive (Metro), under its 'Mybus' service banner.

Last year, Metro awarded part of its school bus operation to CT Plus, an operating subsidiary of London-based Hackney Community Transport, using yellow buses sourced by Metro, and a total of 15 contracts requiring 17 low floor BMC buses are involved.

Metro unveiled the first of 60 Turkish-built BMC low floor school buses at Coach and Bus Live, which will enter service

New look for veteran school bus operators P&O Lloyd of Flintshire

Single deck future in Wales

A lifetime of double deck operation by Flintshire operator P&O Lloyd of Bagillt, looks set to end, as new single deck school bus contracts start replacing double deck contracts in line with Welsh assembly policy. Three new single deck contracts kicked in after Easter, with seven-year contracts replacing two and three-year ones.

Lloyds have purchased a 60-seat Turkish-built BMC bus and two 70-seat Polish-built Autosan buses, which have replaced Leyland Olympians on a one-for-one basis. The company is not the only operator in the county taking on school contracts, but with 17 double deckers is the largest such operator, using well-equipped vehicles that sometimes run just 30 miles per day.

Director David Lloyd said that the BMC bus was quite like a Bedford VAM, and did not have air suspension, but felt that the Autosan 12-metre buses were very well turned out, and were very much liked by the schools. "They cost around £100k, and another thousand to put in my choice of moquette, and I think they should stand up well to seven years of work" he said. All three buses have been purchased by the operator, and an improved tender price over seven years has been agreed to enable their purchase and operation.

Cheshire girl cheats death

A young girl cheated death last week after falling from the rear door of a school bus in Cheshire.

The accident happened at 15.30 last Wednesday at the junction of the A5117 and Little Stanney Lane near the Cheshire Oaks retail village. Witnesses saw the 11-year-old girl lying on the road after she fell from the emergency exit.

She was taken to a local hospital with serious head injuries before being transferred to the Alder Hey children's hospital in Liverpool. She was initially in a critical condition but stabilised over the weekend. Doctors now say she is expected to make a full recovery. Police and Cheshire County Council are investigating.

CT Plus spreads its wings to introduce services in West Yorkshire

during this academic year.

The company has now started up at premises on the Greens Industrial Park in Wakefield, and is led by operations manager Andrew Hammond, and assistant operations manager Shirley Wilkinson, both of whom have operational experience in the freight transport industry. Three routes started in March, but the big push took place this week, with over half the operations under way. Further additions will come in June and July, with the full complement of routes being up and running at the start of the next term.

CT Plus is the wholly-owned commercial trading arm of Hackney Community Transport, which is a non-profit-making organisation, operating nearly 100 buses in London ranging from double deckers to accessible minibuses from depots at Ash Grove and Waltham Forest.

It runs special educational needs home-to-school transport in Waltham Forest as well as operating a number of mainstream bus services for TfL. HCT employs over 300 staff and also acts as a co-ordination body, procuring transport for some council social services departments, manages the Capital Call project and the Plus Bus Hail & Ride project for some councils.

Mrs Wilkinson told *CBW* that the company was now submitting tenders for the next round of franchises, and hoped to grow operations further later this year.

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FINANCIAL

First through the £3bn barrier

Growth in its UK rail business and North American transport interests helped FirstGroup deliver an improved set of results, despite a downturn in UK bus profits. Group turnover shot through the £3 billion marker, and pre-tax profits also grew despite a £31m increase in fuel costs across the group.

Results for the year show that turnover grew 12.5% from £2.69bn to £3.03bn, and group operating profits rose 3.3% from £204m to £210.7m.

Pre-tax profits before goodwill and exceptionals rose to £176.4m compared with £165.5m a year ago, and the retained profit for the year rose 2.4% from £114.6m to £117.4m.

The dominance of the UK bus division in both turnover and profit has finally ebbed away, with the original business now contributing just over a third of the group results. Turnover in the UK bus division climbed 7.3% from £960.7m to £1031.2m, but the operating profit (£108.6m) fell 5.7% from £115.2m. This was down for the third year running, with margins slipping from 13% a few years ago to 10.5%.

Chief executive Moir Lockhead said that significant cost increases, in particular fuel, continue to pressure margins in UK Bus.

"Our aim is to drive down unit costs through operational efficiencies and higher productivity. We are carrying out a detailed review of route profitability to ensure that we closely match service provision with demand and manage our resources as efficiently as possible."

He said that while margins in UK Bus remained under pressure, the priority is to achieve sustainable growth in profits through high-quality customer service and increased patronage.

Impressive results for FirstGroup as turnover passes the £3bn mark

The group spent £95.4m (£66.2m in 2004/5) on new low floor vehicles during the year, with investment made primarily at Glasgow and Manchester. Further investment has been targeted in towns and cities with potential for passenger growth including Aberdeen, Bath, Bristol, Edinburgh and the Borders, Halifax, Huddersfield, Norwich and Stoke-on-Trent.

"The UK was insulated from the rise in crude oil prices due to a fully hedged position. Looking ahead, we now have 38% coverage of our UK requirements for 2006/07 (total annual usage 2.6m barrels) at an average rate of $59 per barrel.

"In North America (total annual usage 0.7m barrels) for 2006/07 we have 36% coverage on crude oil price risk at an average price of $35 per barrel," added Mr Lockhead.

SUMMARY

Year ended 31 March	2006 £m	2005 £m
Turnover Continuing operations	3,030	2,693
Operating profit (after exceptionals)	210.7	204.0
Pre-tax profit	176.4	165.5
Pre-tax profit (after exceptionals)	157.4	155.7
Retained profit	117.4	114.6
Net Debt	704.4	663.1
DIVISIONAL RESULTS		
UK Bus		
Turnover	1,031	960.7
Operating profit	108.6	115.2
(Financing element of UK PCV leases)	(10.2)	(9.0)
UK Rail		
Turnover	1,164	1,059
Operating profit	79.6	64.5
N America		
Turnover	823.6	665.8
Operating profit	67.1	62.4
Other (inc trams)		
Turnover	8.5	7.2
(Operating loss)	(15.4)	(18.3)

Stagecoach back on right track

A new book by David Freud, the great-grandson of the psychoanalyst, on his time spent working in the City of London, has shed more light on the acquisition of Coach USA by Stagecoach.

Freud was an investment banker at UBS, employed as corporate brokers to Stagecoach, until it was fired in 1999. Freud says his company was about to pitch the acquisition of Ryder, the US school bus operator, when Stagecoach awarded the contract to Credit Suisse First Boston instead.

Stagecoach went on to buy Coach USA – Freud says the purchase was "rushed" through – which almost ended in disaster when the company was forced to write-off over £800m when the business hit trouble. Meanwhile, First Group bought Ryder for £602m, and has gone from strength to strength.

Since then, Stagecoach has put the episode firmly behind it with a string of awards for its corporate communications, including a prestigious prize for its corporate video, 'Delivering Innovation'.

The video was produced by World Television.

Steven Stewart, Stagecoach Group Head of Media and Public Affairs, says: "Stagecoach has built up excellent relationships with its investors, customers and other key stakeholders, and our commitment to clear and open communications has been a central part of that success."

Go-Ahead climbs

Go-Ahead has jumped from 69th to 54th in the fourth Business in the Community's Corporate Responsibility Index, published in the Companies That Count list in *The Sunday Times*. The company was the second-highest ranked transport company behind British Airways.

The ratings are based on companies' commitment to openness and transparency in leadership and management, and the measurement of social and environmental performance. Go-Ahead was recognized for its: "Continuous improvement in reducing polluting vehicle emissions throughout operations, as well as its performance in environment management and workplace management."

Eco Warriors

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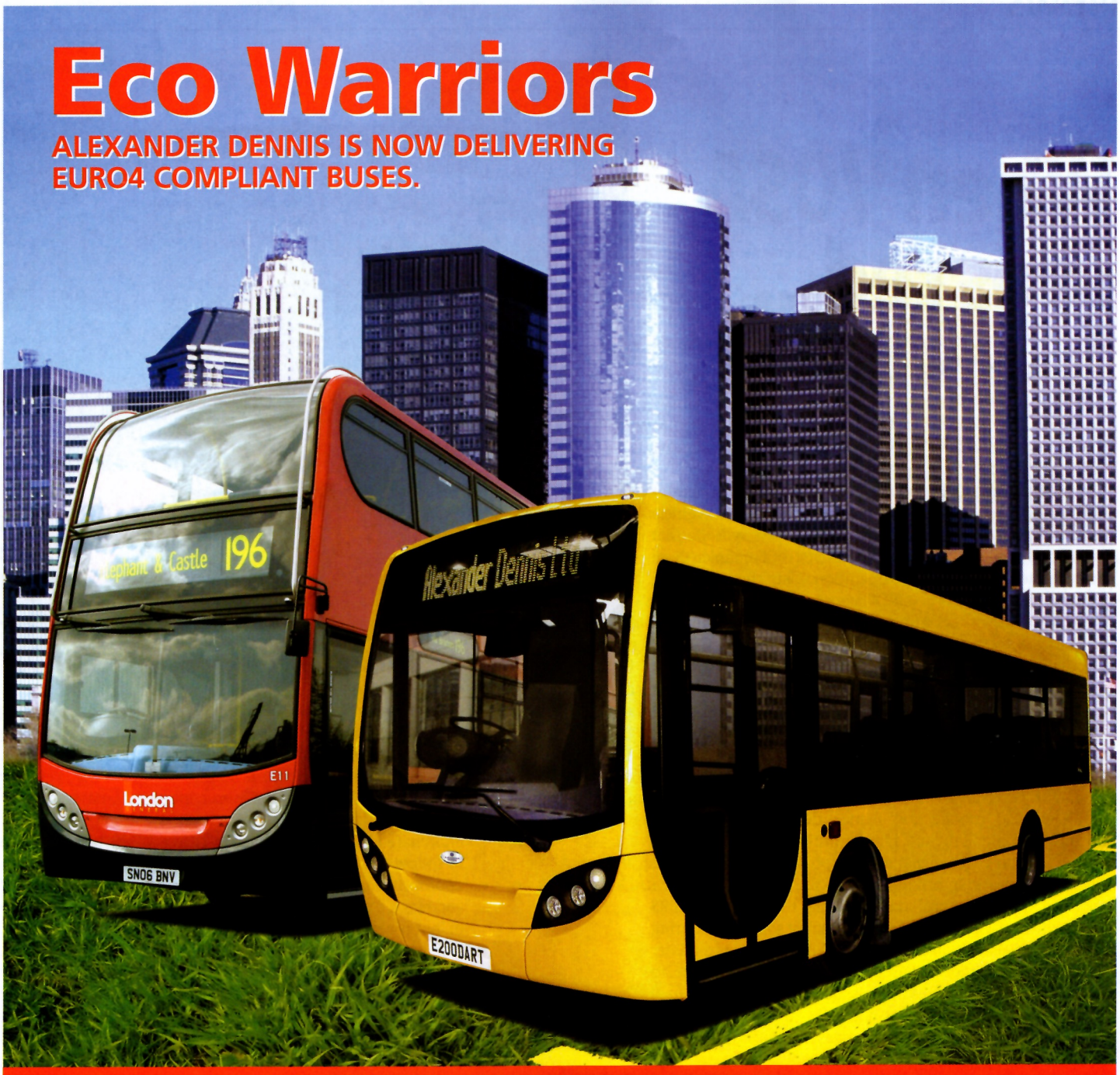

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When VOSA sees red...

Ministry's new colour scheme to identify the rogue operators

Coach and bus operators are now being ranked according to 'Risk of Non-Compliance' by VOSA, with the operators having the worst records to be singled out at Ministry checks.

From September, all operators will be ranked in one of three categories: red, amber or green, based on vehicle roadworthiness and compliance with traffic law over the past two years. Where no such history exists, VOSA ranks them according to similar types of operation using the size of the fleet and the age and type of 'O' licence.

The process of selecting which vehicles to check is increasingly automated, since VOSA's roll-out of ANPR (automatic number plate recognition) technology. This uses fixed, portable and mobile cameras to read vehicle number plates and flag up alarms if the vehicle is shown to be unlicenced, out of test, subject to prohibition, or untaxed. It will also alert the enforcement official if the operator comes into the amber or red categories.

VOSA officials can also enter a vehicle's registration number into hand-held mobile compliance devices (MCDs). This will not only highlight the factors outlined above, but can also be used to check digital tachograph Driver Cards and the digital tachographs. Information from the encounter is then uploaded to the central database via the wireless GPRS network. When legislation allows (probably some time during 2007) the MCDs will also be used by officials to administer the forthcoming Graduated Deposit, Fixed Penalty Scheme, to allow fixed penalty notices to be issued at the roadside.

Buses and coaches are not normally subject to roadside stops and checks: concerns with passenger welfare usually mean that PCVs are only checked if empty or they have already stopped somewhere (a service area for instance) which has facilities for passengers. However it is worth noting that the VOSA patrols in a fleet of 48 specially-equipped Ford Galaxy vehicles and now have the power to stop vehicles on the road in England and Wales – and that their procedure for doing this is different from that used by the police.

When the driver sees this, follow it to the check area

Police remain behind a vehicle when they are ordering it to stop, and will pursue it if it fails to do so. VOSA vehicles will tail their target and then, on a motorway, pass it slowly with amber lights flashing to attract the driver's attention. Illuminated signs then instruct the driver of the target vehicle to follow the VOSA patrol to the check area and stop when appropriate (video evidence is gathered from cameras front and rear if a vehicle fails to comply, but VOSA does not engage in 'hot pursuit').

If you find your vehicles are being subject to roadside checks on a regular basis, or VOSA is turning up at your yard with increasing frequency, then the chances are that you are rated as red or perhaps amber on VOSA's system. There is no easy way out. Each encounter with the authorities (and this can be a roadside check, a fleet inspection or an annual test) counts as an event. Defects found on vehicles or offences committed by drivers are scored according to their severity. The operator's score is divided by the number of events to reach an average, graded from one to 10. The exact divisions into red, green and amber vary according to operator classification (O-licence type and fleet size), but typically operators scoring nine or 10 will be in the red zone. Every two weeks, the operator's ranking is updated. There are separate ratings for vehicle condition and traffic offences.

As a consequence, it is more important than ever that operators ensure their vehicles are presented for annual test in top condition. Even one test failure will count against an operator's ranking, and a rash of them (particularly for safety-critical items such as tyres and brakes) could trigger a rapid trip into the red zone. The days of sending vehicles in for 'diagnostic tests' and then putting right everything must end. Operators should make this clear to their maintenance contractors (or in-house workshop managers), and demand an explanation for every failure. Unless you want to descend into a world of hassle, MoT test failure should no longer be an option.

■ Operators can check their ratings via the VOSA national number: 0870 6060440.

'O' licence reform on the cards

VOSA is set on reforming the current 'O' licence system in a way which it says will make things easier for the majority of operators.

Consulting with the leading freight and passenger road transport operators' bodies, VOSA has proposed centralising all GB 'O' licence admin functions at the Leeds Traffic Area Office, and combining fees for testing and licensing.

Operators with centres in more than one traffic area would come under the control of just one traffic commissioner, who will handle all their licence applications, variation and disciplinary functions wherever they were in the country.

VOSA asked the industry groups to consider two options for licensing and testing. The first would merge all licence, application and variation fees within the annual test fee, and the second would merge licence and testing fees but retain separate application and variation fees. The second option proved the more popular.

Abolition of the margin concession and the licence disc would mean that operators would have to notify the traffic commissioner immediately when they began to use a vehicle, but discs would not be abolished until the technology to maintain enforcement at at least its current level is in place.

Arriva push in Portugal

Arriva continues its relentless push into Western Europe, with the purchase of a £41m stake in Barraqueiro, the largest privately-owned passenger transport operator in Portugal, giving it 21.5%, and two directors on the nine-person board. The deal follows a joint venture proposal last year, to combine its bus business with Barraqueiro's bus and rail operations in Lisbon, which was vetoed by the Portuguese competition authority and is now being appealed.

Barraqueiro is owned by the Pedrosa family, which has about 20% of the Portuguese bus market with 4,800 employees and 2,000 buses and coaches. It owns a number of free-standing subsidiaries like EVA, Frota Azul, and Rodoviária, and is particularly strong in the south of the country and the Lisbon area. In addition it is Portugal's only private passenger rail operator with 18 routes, while in Lisbon it operates Fertagus, a commuter rail operation, and has a 34% stake in the city's new tram system. In the year to 31 December, 2005, Barraqueiro revenues, including Fertagus, was €268.4 million. Profit after tax was €4.4 million.

Arriva will purchase Barraqueiro's treasury shares, representing 15% of the share capital, and will acquire the 6.5% balance of shares from the private shareholders. The majority of the cash will be invested in the business to contribute to growth. Interestingly, the agreement provides Arriva with a discretionary option to redeem its cash (plus interest) at various times up to 2011. In the short term, Arriva anticipates the transaction will be broadly earnings neutral.

This investment provides Arriva with a stronger platform to take advantage of an evolving market, including the anticipated establishment of metropolitan transport authorities in the major cities of Lisbon and Porto. The deal will have no impact on the operation of Arriva's Transportes Sul do Tejo (TST) business which operates 650 buses on the Setubal peninsula, south of Lisbon, nor on Arriva's inter-urban bus and coach services operated by 220 vehicles in northern Portugal.

Arriva entered the Portuguese bus market in 2000 when it acquired AMI Transportes, Joao Carlos Soares and Abilio da Costa Moreira, three family-owned companies which ran inter-urban services in the north of Portugal.

In 2002, Arriva acquired 51% of TST from Barraqueiro and the remaining 49% in 2003. Its businesses in Portugal now employ 1,700 people working on over 900 vehicles.

David Martin, chief executive of Arriva, said that Barraqueiro had a strong, well-respected management with a wealth of understanding of the market, and significant experience in multi-modal operations. "This investment is another step in developing Arriva's access to the evolving public transport market in Portugal," he added.

Citaro makes ideal ambulance for the bigger patient

A new large-capacity emergency ambulance for the Stuttgart Fire Brigade – based on a Mercedes-Benz Citaro urban bus – will assist the fire brigade and civil protection services in the city, especially in the event of major catastrophes involving mass injuries or sickness.

This two-axle bus, measuring 12 m long and 2.55 m wide, offers more than a means of transport for up to 15 casualties. With five treatment areas including beds for the seriously injured and 10 seats for treating people with minor injuries, it is a fully-equipped mobile treatment room for casualties, which can also be used as a mobile medical centre at major events – or for transporting extremely heavy patients, according to a spokesman.

The vehicle is also part of the emergency response plan put in place for this year's World Cup.

Interior of the large-capacity Citaro ambulance is fully equipped in case of a major emergency

Briefly

Volvo is investing $333m in a new factory in Himachal Pradesh, India, in association with local firm Jaico Automobiles Engineering. A letter of intent was signed between the partners last week. The project is still in the early stages, but the plant is expected to employ around 3,000 people.

An off-duty school bus driver in Traverse City, Michigan has been caught selling crack cocaine to an undercover policeman. The 47-year-old woman was placed on immediate unpaid leave. Drivers in the county are subject to drug checks before employment, on a random basis, and if they are involved in an accident.

A Beijing bus conductor has been sentenced to death for strangling a young passenger who did not pay the full fare. 14-year-old Yan Jiqin was travelling with her parents when she got into a row with the female conductor, which quickly turned violent. The conductor has won a two-year reprieve for her sentence, apparently common in cases where there are some "mitigating circumstances".

A women's group in Qatar has taken to the streets to campaign for women-only buses. Buses in the capital Doha have apparently turned into virtually men-only services because of endemic harrassment of lone women in the country. The women collected 720 signatures over last weekend.

A bus aide in Merrillville, Indiana has handed herself into police after she was caught on CCTV abusing a passenger. The 29-year-old woman was seen dragging the young girl down the aisle and slamming her into a seat. She has been charged with neglect and battery over the incident in February. She had been on the run since.

LEZ will cost industry at least £250m

Shock report reveals staggering bill for making coaches compliant with capital's new emissions regulations

The London Low Emissions Zone could land the industry with £250 million costs if coaches are made compliant.

An independent report says that less than a third of coaches - based on a survey of CPT members - will meet the Euro III standard demanded by 2008, and two years later, the proportion meeting Euro IV will be even lower.

The options for bringing Euro II vehicles up to standard include fitting a particulate filter for between £3,500 and £5,000, repowering with a Euro III engine for between £20,000 and £30,000, and for vehicles earlier than Euro II, a complete exhaust system costing £10,000.

"The cost of reinvestment in new or replacement used coaches would be affected in two ways by the LEZ," says the report. "Firstly, coaches would have to be replaced more frequently and ahead of their planned economic lives."

Even those operators who invest in Euro II replacements will, two years later, have to go through the process again to meet Euro IV.

The second problem is that the residual value of non-compliant vehicles will be hit, and the cost of bringing them to the standard might make then technically worthless.

"Modifying nearly 9,000 vehicles over a period of two years... equates to around 90 vehicles per week. To modify 12,900 coaches for 2010 over a period of two years (the period between the Euro II and Euro IV compliance dates) equates to 129 a week."

The report says that London tourism is heavily dependent on incoming coaches, and that school transport - especially study trips - could become impossible for schools to run if the available parc is reduced by the LEZ.

At a seminar during last week's Coach Tourism exhibition, the CPT's coach consultant, Allan Edmondson, explained that only half of London's pollution comes from transport, and only 2.1% of that from coaches.

"We agree with an air quality strategy, but we have been reaching out to Transport for London to say this isn't the way to do it," he told operators.

But he said the CPT's objections have been mirrored by backing from unusual areas - The Confederation of British Industry, London First, the Association of London Government, and even councils such as Barnet (see *CBW* news May 17).

"The proposals will not only have an impact on us, but on business, tourism and local authorities. TfL is getting a clear, consistent message."

Mr Edmondson said the CPT's response has offered three alternatives: to drop the LEZ for coaches altogether, to lower the emissions standards set for 2008 and 2010 to Euro II and Euro III respectively, or to delay implementation for two years. Another possibility is to employ a simple eight-year age limit on vehicles in the LEZ.

Critical: Allan Edmondson (top) and Steve Whiteway (above)

Epsom Coaches' operations director Steve Whiteway said the problem is exacerbated by under-investment in new vehicles. With only 4% of the fleet being renewed each year, the "coach parc is quite old," he said.

"Paying a £200 premium for non-compliant vehicles isn't an advantage to the environment - it just goes in the TfL coffers. And the industry has cleaned up its act. There isn't anything like the problem we used to have with smoky buses."

Mr Whiteway admitted that, with his company's relatively modern fleet, LEZ could place him at an advantage, and may enable him to achieve the correct hire price differential to reflect his investment, but this would be offset by the fact that his secondhand vehicles, if not compliant, will have lower residual values.

Mr Whiteway believes that, by 2010, only half the London bus fleet will be Euro IV compliant: "For that reason, TfL might delay the onset of the second emissions standard date."

Mr Edmondson said the cost of enforcement equipment including Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) cameras would be "huge" set against very small benefits.

"They will be using the congestion charging apparatus, but we are waiting to see if there will be a camera on every road. We are told it will be a mixture of fixed and mobile cameras. Some school routes move in and out of the LEZ more than once - will they be charged twice if non-compliant?"

He said the CPT had also argued that the LEZ will encourage a shift back to cars and taxis, which are much worse polluters per passenger mile: "The tourism market in London is still very fragile, and people will shift for the tiniest reason. When landing fees increased at Heathrow, the airport went from the busiest in the world to fifth in the table within 18 months."

Steve Whiteway also pointed out that the government may end up bearing an unexpected cost from the LEZ: "Schools in the London area who hired coaches for short journeys may cotton on to the fact that children get completely free travel on the bus...."

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Daily Mail

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Regional News

CBW takes a look at the big issues where you live in our round-up of the regions. If you've got a local issue you would like us to cover, contact Andrew Peace at *andrew.peace@rouncymedia.co.uk*

SCOTLAND

Lobby group the **Edinburgh Traffic Forum** held its AGM last week. One of the items on the agenda was the future of Lothian Buses.

Chief executive Neil Renilson and operations director Bill Campbell both addressed the meeting. The company, which is 91% owned by Edinburgh City Council with the rest shared between the Lothian Councils, will shortly come under the umbrella of newly-created Transport Edinburgh Limited (TEL), loosely based on the TfL model.

TEL will be responsible for integrating the new tram system with the bus network. Lothian Buses marketing manager Iain Coupar told *CBW* that the meeting went well. Locals were reassured that for all intents and purposes Lothian will be unaffected by the business reorganisation. The tram proposal is progressing well, he says, with Royal Assent due in the near future.

Scottish newspapers have been enjoying the case of the Polish bus driver who reportedly got repeatedly lost while driving the 105 miles from Aberdeen to Inverness. The **Stagecoach** driver called on passengers for help after losing his way when diverting from the A96 to pick up fares.

A Stagecoach spokesman told the *Daily Record* the driver had been fully route-trained and had completed the route with a mentor and on his own previously, adding: "The fact he is a Pole is irrelevant. We employ just over 100 Polish drivers in the UK and they have been excellent. Anyone from outside the UK undergoes language tuition."

The driver will now undergo refresher training. Amazingly, he was only 15 minutes late.

A public meeting last Monday in Springburn, organised by Glasgow MSP Paul Martin, called on *First Group* to run more services in the area. Currently there are no buses to the city centre after 6pm. Martin was quoted as saying: "I think we should go for a community transport model where there will be more competition in the market from a number of service providers... I think the Scottish Executive should start looking to regulate it so we can then tell the bus companies where they should be, and not the other way round." First representative, Ronnie Park, service delivery director, said services are not viable in some parts of the area but promised to "provide a bus service that you deserve."

Scottish traffic commissioner Joan Aitken opened the refurbished **Arriva** bus depot in Johnstone last week.

The depot is home to 230 employees who now have proper mess facilities and a training suite which includes an instructor's office and a 'learning centre', equipped with computers and a theory test room. The redevelopment took five months.

Unveiling a commemorative plaque, Mrs Aitken said: "The ongoing work at Johnstone demonstrates Arriva's commitment to maintaining its vehicles in the best of conditions. I am pleased to see such improvements in the working conditions for the mechanics, engineers, drivers and all who serve to get the buses out to the people of Renfrewshire. I am impressed too by the in house training facilities for those starting out on a new career in bus driving."

Scottish traffic commissioner Joan Aitken unveils a commemmorative plaque as she opens Arriva's new depot at Johnstone. "I'm impressed," she said

NORTH

Stagecoach North West has promised to investigate after a disabled man was apparently refused entry to a bus for not having the correct change. "I showed him my leg, which is crushed, but he wasn't interested at all," Jason Turner, of Walney, near Barrow told the *North-West Evening Mail*. "He just wanted me to get off. It's not right, the way he treated me."

Willie McPhail, Stagecoach NW operations manager said: "This should not have happened. I would be very annoyed if any of my drivers turned away a passenger for not having the correct change."

Northumbria Council's mission to pare its transport subsidies to the minimum has lead to more trouble, this time with its district authorities.

The withdrawal of **Northumbria Coaches**' services in Castle Morpeth, after intense competition from Arriva, and the county council's decision to stop supporting 30 more services elsewhere in the region, has lead to all six district authorities clubbing together to prevent the cuts. Local councillors have described themselves as "public defenders" and are wading into battle with County Council leader Bill Brookes. A "crunch" meeting is being held as *CBW* goes to press.

MIDLANDS

Buses in one East Midlands city could benefit from a £1 million shot in the arm - thanks to motorists.

Drivers in **Leicester** have paid nearly £2 million in ticket charges and fines for on-street parking in the last 12

Briefly

After winning Transport for London's "Garage of the Year" award last month, staff at Stagecoach's Waterden Road depot in Hackney Wick have revealed some of the 'items' left behind on their buses.

They include a baby (yes, really) and £4,000 in cash. The baby was quickly reunited with its mother. They did not say what happened to the money

A member of the public who assaulted a bus driver in London is starting a 21-month prison sentence.

Derek Porter, 35, led a gang attack on Fehim Omerovic, a First London driver, last June on the E3 Ealing to Greenford bus.

Mr Omerovic was left with a serious stab wound

Briefly

Operators using the Humber Bridge may be granted a concession on the toll charge. The Transport secretary has asked the Humber Bridge Board to consider the findings of the public inquiry into the toll charges, which recommends reducing the charges for service buses.

The toll was recently increased from £10 per journey to £10.90. One operator threatened to withdraw services as the toll charges were making its service uneconomic.

Service bus crossings have reduced by 61% in the last 10 years, according to the DfT's figures

A Chase bus driver in Walsall was surprised to see her own car on the back of a lorry parked up at the stop she was about to use. The driver insisted he had just bought the white Peugeot 405, but then made off. Lesley Edwards, 32, who is six months pregnant, gave chase but lost sight of her vehicle on the outskirts of the town. She said: "It was like something out of The Sweeney. I regularly drive this route and all of the passengers have been really nice to me. If it wasn't my car it might be funny."

The man who caused £10,000 worth of damage to this Nottingham City Transport Scania has been sent to prison for 12 months. Simon Martin, 24, pleaded guilty to assault and criminal damage after getting into a fight with another customer last September. The whole incident was captured on CCTV.

"We have a dedicated police officer in the building and as a result of that have developed a fantastic relationship with the police and got a very positive response," NCTX managing director Mark Fowles told *CBW*. "It was a regrettable incident and a trauma for our driver, but the high profile the case received shows that we have the means and the mechanisms to take action when this kind of thing happens."

months. Half of that may now be earmarked to save bus routes in the city that do not make a profit. The money has come from Leicester's 140 pay and display machines, with the city council collecting £1,989,561 in 2005/6 - nearly a quarter-of-a-million pounds up on the previous year.

Council leaders are meeting later this week to decide which routes would receive cash, and they are expected to include those taking children to and from school.

Both councillors and head teachers say the city needs better routes. City transport spokesman, John Mugglestone, said: "We need to spend this money on improving traffic flow, which means better public transport. People have been left without buses, especially in some of the poorer estates in the outer parts of the city, because services have been scrapped. We have to keep the city alive and buses are crucial."

Although the council is not saying which companies will receive the bulk of the cash, *CBW* understands it will be targeted at services that are popular with users, but not commercially viable, plus the buses used mainly by school pupils.

The cash could mean that a decision earlier this year to scrap seven school buses - which, in turn, raised fears over increased truancy - could now be reversed.

As fuel prices rise ever higher, **Centro** is looking at alternative fuels. Liverpool is harnessing electric technology, and London is looking at hydrogen fuel cells, but Birmingham is preparing to go where neither of these, so far, dare. Centro-PTA scrutiny chairman Cllr Chaman Lal tells the *Birmingham Mail*: "It is certainly the case that other countries use animal by-products to produce power, even burning cowpats. We need to look into the issue very seriously, and that is why we will look to produce a scrutiny report into potential other forms of power. I am sure the scientists can find ways to use different kinds of power in our buses." Fellow scrutiny member Cllr Renee Spector adds: "I have read that hydrogen sulphide released from cows can be used to create power, and it has the benefits that it is free and not producing harmful emissions." Not harmful maybe, but not pleasant either.

SOUTH EAST

A mobile phone vigilante is targeting bus and coach drivers in **High Wycombe**. The man, a doctor, has spotted six drivers in the last year and has written two letters each to Arriva and Heyfordian Travel.

"They replied to my letters, but the message doesn't seem to be getting through to their employees. The companies need to do more to stamp this out," he said.

Graham Smith of Heyfordian Travel said: "We take a very dim view on drivers using mobile phones. We do not encourage staff to use hands-free kits because that can still affect their concentration.

"We have not had any further complaints since the doctor's letters."

Roadworks

A66 Penrith
Current: One lane closed due to bridge maintenance work on M6 both ways at J40.

M60 Greater Manchester
Current: One lane closed for barrier repairs anti-clockwise between J24 (A57) and J23 (A6410/A635).

M1 Hertfordshire
Until December 31, 2008: Speed restriction of 40 mph and narrow lanes both ways between J6A M25 and J10 M1 (Luton Airport).

M25 Waltham Abbey
Until December 31: One lane closed and 40mph speed restriction both ways between J25 (A10) and J26 (A121). Exit sliproad closed at J25 clockwise.

M5 North Somerset
Until July 31: Speed restriction both ways between J19 A369 (Portishead) and J20 B3133 (Clevedon).

M4 Taunton
Until July 31: Speed restriction of 50mph between J25 (A358) and J26 (A38).

M4 South Gloucestershire
Until August 31: Speed restriction and narrow lanes both ways between J18 (A46) and J19 (M32).

M4 Wiltshire
Until May 27: Lane closed due to roadworks between J15 (A419) and J16 (A3102/B4005).

A38 West Midlands
Until June 19: Bassett's Pole Island. Closed for widening to three lanes from 20:00 until 06:00 weekends between May 19-May 22; June 2-June 5; June 9-June 12; and June 16-June 19.

M6 Staffordshire
Until June 30: Speed restriction of 40 mph due to resurfacing work on M6 Northbound between J12 A5 (Gailey) and J13 A449 (Stafford South).

In association with
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Germany calling ...with business opportunities

German customers love castles and historic buildings. This is Braunfels/ Lahn's medieval spectacular

Operators looking to increase business opportunities in Germany should consider attending the RDA workshop that is being held in Cologne from August 8 to 10.

The workshop is the major trade fair and purchasing forum for the international coach tourism industry. Visitors have access to exhibitors from 30 countries representing hotels, theme parks, visitor attractions, carriers, transport services, tourist boards and coach manufacturers.

As with the Coach Tourism Show that was held last week, those attending are primarily coach and group tour operators at senior management and purchasing levels, so the number of orders remain buoyant.

Those UK operators who are attending should consider the merits of the show against the background of the German coach tourism market, which has remained stable over the past 12 months. According to Dr Patrick Partridge, who runs a tourism and PR consultancy in Frankfurt, the latest research indicates that 6.41 million coach tourism holidays of five days or more were taken in 2005, which represented ten per cent of the total number of holidays taken.

It is estimated that this market can be grown, with around 23 per cent of Germans planning to take a coach holiday over the next three years, which represents a growth increase of 4.5 per cent since the turn of the millennium. Looking further ahead, Dr Partridge says that the coach tourism business forecast is healthy in Germany, with experts identifying five million potential new customers. Growth is expected in city breaks, short breaks in general and cultural and other themed tours targeted at the expanding over-50s market.

Dr Partridge points out that this projected increase should be beneficial to UK coach operators as more than 71 per cent of German coach tourism holidaymakers travel abroad to destinations primarily within Europe. However, this is still very much a fragmentary market consisting of 1,000 coach tourism operators and 5,000 coach transportation companies - mainly local transportation, day trips and club outings. The other database that UK operators can tap into consists of the thousands of clubs and associations who rely on coach companies to organise outings and tours.

Initial statistics from VisitBritain show that of the 3.3 million German holidaymakers who visited Great Britain last year - a figure that was 12 per cent up on 2004, - around 30 per cent of them travelled by coach

Flock to the zoo: and make friends with macaws at the Chessington World of Adventure birthday celebrations

Take flight for some real animal magic

Youngsters of all ages should head to Chessington World of Adventures this weekend to enjoy some animal magic that marks the 75th anniversary of Chessington Zoo.

The Surrey attraction is staging a series of special events from this Saturday, May 27, to Sunday June 4. There will be animal costume characters, furry meet 'n' greets, big band music and an interactive exhibition featuring old photos, footage and memorabilia. The park is also opening a new animal attraction called Creature Features, featuring wallabies, rheas, porcupines, skunks and meerkats. These will be alongside the regular inhabitants such as exotic birds and wild animals.

Children are encouraged to dress up as animals during their visit and a procession will take place at the end of each day during the bank holiday weekend. Noddy and friends will continue to entertain with daily stage shows and then Basil Brush will perform a magic show every day from June 10 to 30.

Families can then head for the theme park where 90 per cent of the rides are suitable for children under 12. As a special bonus, every child under 12 who is accompanied by a full paying adult is admitted free every day of the season.

Groups of 10 or more qualify for an admission price of £24.30 per person for all visitors over 12. There is ample coach parking.

■ For more details call the group booking line on 0870 400 3083.

and contributed £200 million to the UK economy.

As for demographics, Dr Partridge points out that the majority of German coach holidaymakers are from the 55-plus age group and the middle-income bracket. In addition, operators should consider that a considerable number are widows who are looking to coach travel for all-round service and information in their native language, so single room availability and multi-lingual couriers are at a premium.

Other trends that Dr Partridge feels that UK operators should be aware of are that the vast majority of groups want a minimum three-star standard of accommodation, they like to travel by ferry but flight and coach groups are on the rise.

As for tour itineraries, places of cultural and historical interest figure high, especially in those groups in the higher-priced category who prefer to fly to join study or escorted sightseeing tours. Overall, three-quarters of German coach holidaymakers who toured the UK in 2005 visited places of cultural and historical interest, the most popular being historic houses and castles. More than half also visited monuments, museums, art galleries, gardens and heritage centres.

Dr Partridge concludes that there is an increasing interest in Great Britain at present with lots of groups booking early. Based tours and escorted sightseeing tours with a maximum of seven nights in Britain are selling well.

The RDA is the industrial federation of bus tour operators and their contract partners and has more than 3,000 members in 36 countries. The objectives are political lobbying on behalf of bus tourism and promotion of bus travel operator cooperation with all other companies and organisations involved in the product creation.

■ Operators who want to tap into this potentially lucrative market by attending the workshop should contact Karin Kohls, RDA Workshop GmbH, Hohenzollernring 86 D-50672 Cologne, Germany. Tel: 00 49 221120448 or email: karin.kohls@rda-workshop.de.

Eye on the pie in Melton Mowbray

Heritage is a popular theme for a day trip and groups who are in the Heart of England next month should head for the Melton Mowbray Country Fair, which is held in the Leicestershire town that is famous for its pork pies.

The fair is held on Sunday June 25 and celebrates the heritage of the market town and the surrounding borough. Attractions include a heavy horse show, vintage cars and bikes, steam engines, rural crafts such as willow weaving, farmers' markets and Viking and medieval displays.

There also will be an organic and fair trade tea tent, a real ale tent and plenty of trade stalls. Gates open at 11am and entry is free although there is a suggested donation of £1 per person.

■ For more details go to www.meltononline.co.uk/countryfair.

Head to Melton Mowbray for a celebration of heritage

Monkey business in Bristol

Groups who want to get close to nature in the West Country should find time to visit the award-winning Bristol Zoo. More than 400 species of animals await them in 12 acres of gardens and this summer sees the opening of the new Monkey Jungle that will be home to lemurs.

Pre-bookable group activities include one-hour talks and walks that focus on the role of the modern zoo, the conservation of endangered species and plant and animal interaction.

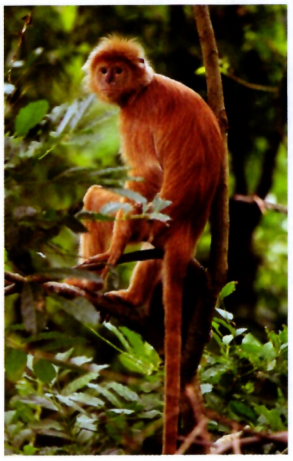
Other attractions that are included in the admission price are seasonal trails and animal encounters at the Terrace Theatre and shows on the lawn.

The following admission prices for groups of ten or more paying customers are valid from June 1 to April 1 2007 – adults £7.90, senior citizens and students £5.80 and children from three to 14 £4.60. Talks and walks and education sessions cost £35. There are no minimum numbers for school groups and there is one free adult place for every seven paying children and one free adult place for every three paying three to four-year-olds.

Hot meals and snacks are available from the Pelican Restaurant and pizza kiosk and there are other snack outlets around the zoo.

Bristol Zoo Gardens is open daily from 9am to 5.30pm (5pm in winter) and coaches may set down and pick up passengers directly on site. There is ample free parking within a three-mile vicinity.

■ For bookings and more details contact the group booking line on 0117 974 7307 or email: groups@bristolzoo.org.uk. For more information about coach parking call the Bristol City coach hotline on 0117 922 2975.



A monkey pictured yesterday... probably

I'm in panto ... I say... I'm in panto

It may be a little premature to start thinking about pantomime but the Opera House in Manchester is hoping to steal a march on its rivals by announcing that present and past Coronation Street favourites John Savident and Suranne Jones are taking leading roles in Snow White.

Suranne, who was the fiery Karen Macdonald, will play Snow White while John, who is leaving his role as the romantic butcher Fred Elliot, will take on the role of the Queen's Henchman.

The pantomime opens on Saturday December 9 and runs to Sunday January 7 2007. Ticket prices are from £8.50 to £22.50 and there are discounts for groups.

■ Call 0800 587 5007 for more details.

Coach parking in London

Drivers are reminded that St Paul's Coach Park in London is closed for repair works until the end of June and alternative provisions have been made for vehicles to park in Queen Victoria Street during this period.

■ More details from the City of London on 020 7332 3366.

by Mike Coatesworth

Wheels within wheels

Wheelchair user Mike Coatesworth was disabled in a road accident after 13 years active service in the Army. Now he yearns for a family holiday to Europe on a coach. But it's not that easy...

After reading in my local paper about all the wonderful places in the UK to be visited, I had a chat with the wife and we decided that it would be nice to go for a trip to Lincoln to visit the traditional markets. It sounded easy enough...

But I was taken aback when I tried to book an excursion by coach.

"Sorry, we don't take full-time wheelchair passengers," was the reply... the very same reply from the many coach companies that I tried.

The consensus was that they would only agree to take the "walking wounded" - passengers who could get out of their wheelchairs and climb the steps of the coach while their wheelchairs were folded away in the luggage compartments.

The coach companies went on to explain that their buses were not adapted for wheelchairs, and to have lifts fitted would not be viable or cost effective, as three seats would have to be removed to accommodate each separate wheelchair. That meant that in the long term the coach companies would lose a lot of money.

One company did telephone me and apologised that they were unable to accommodate wheelchair users on their coaches, but went on to explain that they would consider any ideas that I might have to improve the situation for wheelchair users on the coaches, but they also explained that it would have to be cost-effective. On that basis, I couldn't think of any ideas that would suit both parties.

Having said this, the only time that I've been able to travel on a coach was in Spain, and this was specially laid on for disabled guests at the hotel. It was a normal-sized coach and had a central door that opened to reveal a folding side lift. I wheeled on to the lift and, when it came level with the floor of the coach, I moved forward to the seat in front of me and the arm rest to the seat was already in the upright position, so all I had to do was slide across onto the coach seat. Then my wheelchair was taken off and folded away in the luggage compartment. The coach accommodated four wheelchair users. If it can be done in Spain, then why not the UK?

During my search for an accessible coach company, I came across one in Warrington, who informed me that they did indeed take full wheelchair users all over the country and all over Europe in specially adapted coaches, which I thought was excellent! It seemed that finally I could take my wife and daughter on a trip to Europe...

But my hopes were dashed when they informed me that although there was no problems with their coaches carrying wheelchair users, they only catered for organised parties and I would have to go to Warrington to board the coach, as they do not have localised pick-up points unless the coach happens to be passing through the city or town where member of the party lived on its way to a destination.

Disabled and frustrated: Mike Coatesworth

If you want to let off some steam, just tap away at the keyboard and send your rant (or carefully-reasoned views) to cbwinbox@rouncymedia.co.uk, or fax 0845 280 2927. Make 'Open Platform' the subject line. Alternatively, send your missive to Coach and Bus Week, 3 The Office Village, Cygnet Park, Peterborough PE7 8FD

So although the coaches would be okay for a trip across the UK and Europe, I would have to gather a party of at least a dozen paying wheelchair passengers prepared to travel to Warrington with me to board the coach, to make it viable for the coach company.

I have travelled on planes, ships, trains and cars, and the staff go out of their way to help disabled passengers. But, on average, a wheelchair user can expect to pay up to four times the normal amount to get to a destination. Last year it cost me over £300 for a return fare from Bradford to Norwich by private transport, and £200 from Bradford to Bridlington, which was more than the cost of the holiday.

It would be cheaper for me to travel by coach and enjoy what able-bodied passengers take for granted.

So why is it that out of all the transport available in our modern society, it's the coaches that are no-go areas for wheelchair users?

IN NEXT WEEK'S ISSUE...

- The new 'coach-friendly' Isle of White invites CBW to visit!
- Training special
- Bus Funding - the inside story

PLUS Renault Master Minibus test

LATEST RENAULT LAUNCHES KEITH HALSTEAD PROFILE

CBW Minibus

THE NEW ESSENTIAL READ FOR MINIBUS OPERATORS

May 24, 2006

DAILY EVOLUTION

Can the new Daily rise above the pack of recently launched Euro IV contenders? pages 14-17

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Q'STRAINT

Spoilt for choice

The last few weeks have been 'busy' by any standards, coping with the launches of a whole new generation of panel vans or factory-built minibuses.

But, it has been exciting, because it provided the chance to see how the showdown between Ford's Transit and the Mercedes-Benz Sprinter would come off. For my money, they are now very close. Perhaps too close for one or the other to be calling advantages, but the Transit may still hold an edge thanks to its almost generic name - and this is likely to enable Ford to retain a lead in the market.

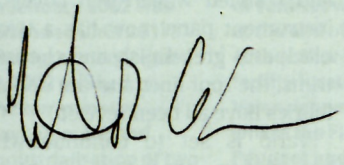
It's somewhat different in our specific market of conversions or coachbuilts because the Sprinter (and VW Crafter derivative) offers a larger platform where more passenger seats can be carried alongside a reasonable amount of luggage. The advent of a 5.0t model gives the Sprinter an immediate advantage in the 16-seat sector and I would expect to see this model become the dominant choice in high-specification minicoaches over the next two or three years.

Not only that, the level of comfort in the Sprinter cab is now unsurpassed and owner/operators are really going to enjoy driving their investments.

Last week the new Iveco Daily joined the fray and also gives a good account of itself - see the launch feature in this issue.

LDV's own Maxus minibus is said to have raised a lot of interest at the launch, yet it struggles to offer what the Convoy did best - give reasonable space and capacity - as for years it was the only vehicle in its class to allow space for 16 seats behind the driver. LWB Maxus can now squeeze in 15 seats, but they are painfully narrow in an effort to gain some leg and elbow room, and not the most comfortable you will find.

BMC's new Megastar is also very short on saloon space but its Grammer seats are far more passenger-friendly once seated.



Martin Cole
Editor

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Workmanlike exterior belies sophisticated new technology concealed in the engine and drivetrain

Vario gains enhanced technology and equipment

The latest generation of the Mercedes-Benz Vario is coming to the market having both its technology and equipment levels upgraded.

Highly regarded by many as the platform of choice for high-capacity minibus or minicoach operation, Vario offers a gross vehicle weight of between 6.0 and 7.5 tonnes. DaimlerChrysler initially cast some doubts about taking the model forward to comply with Euro IV requirements, but was eventually persuaded its market position justified investment. It then developed re-engineered engines to comply with the requirements and new transmissions to complement their characteristics. Vario also gains a revitalised interior.

BlueTec SCR (Selective Catalytic Reduction) technology is employed in the new engines to meet emissions standards and promote better fuel economy. The highly efficient combustion process keeps emissions so low that levels of soot and fine particulate matter are no higher than those normally measured in exhaust gases that have already been filtered. This removes the need for fitting a particulate filter downstream. Using the integral exhaust gas aftertreatment facility based on the SCR operating principle, the aqueous reducing agent AdBlue is then added to selectively convert the nitrogen oxides into harmless nitrogen and water vapour in a catalytic converter. Controlled by the engine's electronics, AdBlue from a separate tank is injected into the hot stream of exhaust gas, where it forms ammonia that triggers the desired chemical reaction. SCR not only ensures compliance with Euro IV limits, it also paves the way for meeting the Euro V limits due to come into force in 2008/2009.

The Vario continues to be driven by four-cylinder 4.25-litre turbodiesel engines that feature fully-electronic engine management, three valves per cylinder and pump-line-nozzle injection technology with dedicated unit pumps for each cylinder.

Output and maximum torque data for the engines fitted in the Vario are:

- 95 kW (129 hp) at 2200 rpm, 500 Nm at 1200-1600 rpm,
- 115 kW (156 hp) at 2200 rpm, 610 Nm at 1200-1600 rpm,
- 130 kW (177 hp) at 2200 rpm, 675 Nm at 1200-1600 rpm.

All Vario models now come with six-speed manual transmission as standard specification. A five-speed automatic option is also available with a new five-speed automatic transmission with lockup clutch (previously four-speed), which is now available. The close ratio spacing in both transmissions results in better tractive power and economy.

Vario's new cab design is claimed to be more attractive, with elegant door trim and integrated stowage pocket and restyled wheel arch covers. The instrument panel now has a two-tone black and grey finish and the interior trims, the roof liner and the upholstery fabrics have all been revised.

Vario is set to continue what it has always done best. Robust and dependable, it has a high payload and is available in a large number of variants, comprising panel van, chassis cab, pickup, tipper and crewcab.

In-house minbus gets CV Show launch

LDV Group launched its in-house minibus at the CV Show last month.

Two main versions of the factory-produced vehicle are being made available with a choice of short wheelbase (3.1m) or long wheelbase (3.85m) offering 12 or 15 seats respectively The shorter version has a roof height of 2.315m and the LWB 2.54m. Either option can be supplied with a 95bhp or 120bhp engine. LDV says both options deliver best in class insurance ratings and low cost of ownership.

Under the minibus development programme, LDV said it gave driver and passenger safety the highest priority. Seats are all forward-facing and equipped with head restraints and 'all-age' integral lap and diagonal seat belts. ABS brakes are standard, as are driver and front passenger airbags, a first aid kit and a fire extinguisher. An additional interior roof light illuminates the rear emergency exit. Isringhausen M-Viro minibus seats were chosen to optimise passenger leg and elbow room. The saloon interior is fully lined to enhance passenger comfort and contribute to noise reduction. Air conditioning and a tinted windscreen and door glasses can be obtained as optional extras. Service intervals are every 20,000 miles and LDV has also introduced strong warranty packages offering three years cover up to 100,000 miles or four years at up to 60,000 miles. Supporting these warranties is LDV's VANaid roadside assistance service and a national network of over 60 specialist dealers, many of which will, this year, achieve 'Centre of Excellence' status.

Show launch for LDV Group's in-house minibus, available in short and long wheelbases

GME and Renault LCV co-operation confirmed

Co-operation between General Motors Europe (GME) and Renault is moving forward with the release of new van versions for the two brands.

In the compact market the Opel/Vauxhall (GM) and Renault brands continue under the model names Vivaro and Trafic, respectively. The larger 3.5t sector also continues for the existing brands – namely Movano (Opel/Vauxhall (GM)) and Master (Renault).

Continued co-operation should enable the manufacturers to improve their coverage of the European LCV market. Over 1.2 million vans have been made since the Renault-GM co-operation on light commercial vehicles began in 1999. Both parties are eager to gain more market share and are pinning their hopes on the development of upgraded versions of these models. Vivaro/Trafic completes its Phase II development and Movano/Master its Phase III. They will come to the market in September – ready for Euro IV emissions compliance.

Scottish Borders surplus minibuses offered to community groups

Scottish Borders Council is offering local community groups the option to buy minibuses now surplus to requirements.

The practice is for a trial period only and the minibuses will be offered for sale to local community groups, who may take advantage of purchasing the vehicles at auction price. The minibuses are normally sold on the open market but SBC feels if they are offered at approximate auction prices it would benefit both the council and the community.

SBC is developing a procedure for future advertisement and sale of vehicles to ensure as many groups as possible are made aware of the opportunity. Depending on the volume of interest shown, the minibuses will be sold based on likely auction prices or - if demand is high - by closed bid auction.

The first batch on offer consists of eight vehicles.

PSA agreements continue

Sergio Marchionne, CEO of Fiat, and Jean-Martin Folz, CEO of PSA Peugeot Citroën, have announced a new partnership between the groups at the Sevel plant in Atessa (Chieti, Italy), the largest light commercial vehicle production facility in Europe.

Co-operation over the development of a commercial vehicle began in 1978 and in January 2002 was extended until 2017. The agreement signed in 2002 defined the terms for the development and industrialisation of two new light commercial vehicles ranges, the first of which has been launched at the Atessa production facility. Production of the second range of vehicles will start at the end of 2006 at the other joint facility located in Valenciennes (France), where the Fiat, Lancia, Peugeot and Citroën-branded large MPVs are also manufactured.

In March 2005, the two groups signed an agreement to develop and produce a third vehicle: a new "minivan" that will be manufactured in the Bursa plant in Turkey under the co-ordination of Tofas and in close co-operation with the two companies.

Production of the new family of commercial vehicles, referred to with the product code X250, began a few days ago at the Atessa plant. The two groups invested over €1.1 billion in its development.

The market-leading Fiat Ducato, Peugeot Boxer and Citroën Jumper (Relay) have sold over two million units and the new generation of commercial vehicles is claimed to set new standards in range variety, load capacity, performance, comfort and running costs.

In a further development of the relationship between Fiat and PSA Peugeot Citroën, a new industrial agreement has been signed.

Starting in 2007 the Fiat Auto plant in Cordoba, Argentina, will assemble a PSA Peugeot Citroën gearbox to be mounted on the Peugeot and Citroën cars sold in South America. Within this 10-year agreement annual production is scheduled at 140,000 units.

It's never been easier to obtain an Iveco minibus thanks to new DriveAway range

Iveco adds drive-away minibus to its options

Iveco has added a 17-seat Daily minibus to its DriveAway Options range, enabling operators to order a new minibus and have it on the road almost immediately.

The Daily DriveAway Options programme means customers only negotiate with their local Iveco dealer, instead of co-ordinating between two or more suppliers - which they claim means significantly shorter delivery times coupled with lower costs and higher residual values.

Chris Thorneycroft-Smith, managing director of Iveco, said: "The minibus market accounted for 8,000 new vehicle sales in 2005 between 2.8 and 6.5 tonnes, with the 3.501 to 6.500 tonne segment increasing by 94% to nearly 3,000 units. At this weight Daily really comes into its own against other models on the market, and we are expecting a strong take-up of orders with our new 'off-the-shelf' Daily minibus."

The 17-seater utilises Daily's 40C12 chassis and features a comprehensive specification including driver and dual front passenger airbags with seatbelt pre-tensioners, together with remote central locking. Standard ABS is supported by electronic brakeforce distribution (EBD) and the vehicle is supplied with a CD and MP3 player, heated rear door windows, sliding spare wheel carrier and a 140 amp alternator, to guard against flat batteries.

The fully-trimmed passenger saloon is completed by Derbyshire-based Advanced Vehicle Builders, which has been manufacturing minibuses since 1976. It features easy-clean slip-resistant flooring, single-glazed saloon windows with sliding openings at the top and height-adjustable three-point seatbelts on M1 category seats with head restraints.

Priced at £26,200, the Daily DriveAway Options minibus is powered by Iveco's 2.3-litre HPI diesel engine, which is capable of developing up to 116hp. It is also available with a 3.0-litre diesel engine producing 136 hp, or with Iveco's state-of-the art AGile semi-automated transmission, subject to a short lead time.

It can also be specified with a range of optional extras including electronic stability programme (ESP), full insulation, reversing sensors, engine bay fire extinguisher, reverse bleeper, manual or automatic side step, 4kW fuel powered saloon heater, coach roof vent or a quick-release system for the back row of seats (to enable extra luggage to be carried).

New director for VW Commercial Vehicles

Robert Hazelwood has been appointed director of Volkswagen Commercial Vehicles in the UK, taking over the role from Peter Wyhinny, who becomes director of SEAT UK.

Robert Hazelwood joined the Volkswagen Group as head of Group Synergies five months ago, prior to which he was managing director of UK Sales and Marketing for MG Rover. Previously, Robert worked at Inchcape plc, where he held roles including CEO and managing director of Inchcape Retail. He has extensive automotive experience, having been employed by Nissan, Citroën, Fiat and Peugeot during his earlier career.

He joins a successful team at Volkswagen Commercial Vehicles, which achieved its sixth consecutive year of growth in 2005 with a record 23,065 registrations in the UK. The development of the brand continues, while the launch of the Crafter, which replaces the LT in Autumn, will complete the renewal of the Volkswagen van range. Sales forecasts predict further growth for the brand in 2006.

Peter Wyhinny moves to his new position with SEAT UK after eight years as director of Volkswagen Commercial Vehicles, having joined the company in 1998 when the Volkswagen Passenger Car and CV businesses were split into separate functions. During his time as Director, Peter led the brand to record-breaking sales, along with establishing a national network of dedicated Van Centres.

Q'Straint expansion

Soaring sales across the world, successful new products and great attention to customer service have resulted in the announcement of three new appointments and the decision to purchase additional warehouse and production space by Q'Straint (Europe), the manufacturer of four-point, tie-down restraint systems for wheelchairs and their passengers being transported in vehicles.

Appointments: Jonathan Eldrige (left) and John Sargent

Based at new headquarters at Whitstable, Kent, Q'Straint (Europe) supplies more than 40 countries as far afield as Japan, in addition to supplying the needs of the thriving UK market.

New appointments are: Jonathan Eldridge as sales engineer for Southern England, John Sargent as accounts manager and Andy Taylor as warehouse manager.

Mike Simmonds, managing director of Q'Straint (Europe), said: "The increase in awareness in many parts of the world about the inadequacy of most forms of wheelchair and occupant restraint in vehicles has led to a demand for top quality, proven products like our internationally-acclaimed QRT system."

Ford keeps Transit prices stable

Ford has released its new Transit price list ahead of the vehicles hitting Britain's roads next month.

Customers will be getting good value for money as 25% of the models remain at the same price and 80% of the remainder increase by under 1%. The most popular van in the range, the 280 SWB 85bhp panel van, remains at £13,650 + VAT and delivery. The largest offering, the new 430 140bhp DRW Jumbo panel van, starts at £23,100.

The new front-wheel drive 2.2-litre 85bhp TDCi matches the price of the current 2.0-litre 85bhp TDdi and the rear-wheel drive 2.4-litre 100bhp TDCi matches the price of the current 2.4-litre 90bhp TDdi

New standard features on Transit include: CD/radio, ABS with disc brakes all round, full steel bulkhead, front mud flaps, high-output alternator, upgraded starter motor and upgraded security systems.

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RENAULT MARKETING

Minibus market share growth spurs Renault

Renault has committed itself to a sustained push in the light commercial vehicle market over the coming months with a number of new development that will be of interest to minibus operators, reports Steve Walker

Renault has reported a steady market performance in 2005 and early 2006 that has seen it retain a position as the UK's fifth-largest LCV supplier. The marque's star performers over this period have been the Trafic and Master panel vans, with both model ranges being supplemented by the addition of new factory-built minibus conversions in February this year.

The minibus sector has remained the largest and fastest-growing of all the light commercial vehicle conversion sectors in recent years with total minibus registrations increasing from 11,514 in 2002 to 14,112 in 2005. The next largest sector is that of motor caravans which accounted for just 8,751 registrations in 2005. Renault's own share of the total conversion market has increased over the same period, with the company supplying 1,904 units in 2005 compared to 782 during 2002. It is hoped the new Trafic and Master minibus conversions can help secure further growth going forward.

In order to maximise the scope of further market penetration by Renault LCV products the manufacturer has set up a dedicated sales team to work with operators nationwide and aid dealerships in winning new business. With responsibility for a region of the country or a specialist sector of the market, each LCV sales manager is tasked with forming a link between operators and Business Centre dealerships, supporting the dealerships in winning new business. The aim is for the experience and specialist commercial vehicle knowledge of these managers to help differentiate Renault from its competitors.

Product

Renault's range of official factory-built minibus conversions have only been available since February, but there are already changes in the pipeline. Details remain sketchy at present, but both the Trafic and Master panel van base vehicle are in line for extensive development with the new versions expected to go on sale in the fourth quarter of 2006.

Operators can expect to see heavily-revised interiors on both vehicles, along with tweaks to the exterior design. It seems unlikely, however, that Renault will mess too vigorously with the winning formula that is the Trafic's styling, the vehicle's distinctive looks being recognised by Renault as a key selling point.

Extensive changes are also on the agenda in the engine bays of both models, with alterations expected to go above and beyond those needed for the purpose of upgrading the powerplants to meet Euro IV emissions regulations. Revised gearboxes are also expected and the new features on the equipment lists will help keep the Master and Trafic up to date.

It's likely the current Renault range of minibus conversions will remain largely unaltered post-facelift. The nine-seat Trafic will continue to be supplemented by six, nine and 16-seat versions of the Master.

Renault sources indicate they are looking at possible additions to the range in the longer term. One possibility is the addition of a luxuriously appointed six-seat Trafic to compete with the likes of Volkswagen's Caravelle, acting as executive transport that can double as a meeting room. A similar vehicle exists in Europe and a right-hand drive version could be produced if Renault feels enough sales can be achieved.

Renault also reports having considerable success with its current range of special offers designed to give Trafic and Master operators extra equipment at a lower price. Until the end of June, customers can choose the 'Air-con+' package which delivers air conditioning, electric windows and electric door mirrors on top of the standard specification, saving Trafic customers £425 and Master customers £475. In 2005 the package was specified on 61% of all Trafic models sold and on 30% of all Masters. There are similar deals on satellite navigation packages where savings of £500 are possible, and on the impressive Quickshift semi-automatic gearbox, which is available at £400.

The Quickshift gearbox allows the driver to select a fully automatic gearchange mode or make clutchless up or down changes via a dash-mounted lever. It has the potential to cut fuel consumption by up to 10% and was being specified on 6% of all Master and Trafic sales prior to the offer. With the price slashed from £800 to £400, Renault predicts as many as 10% of sales in 2006 will have Quickshift fitted.

Winning looks mean minimum styling changes, but Renault has improved accessibility and comfort, as well as upgrading the powerplants to meet Euro IV legislation

Online battles

The internet is fast emerging as a key battleground in the sales war between leading minibus manufacturers. Official LCV and minibus sites are popping up with increasing regularity and catching up with the passenger car equivalents in terms of content and sophistication. Renault's new site is *www.renaultvans.co.uk* and is an attempt not merely to match the competition but to move the game forward.

It contains the usual details of Renault's latest minibus and light commercial vehicle products but includes a level of interactivity that's uncommon among rival sites. Browsers who know what they want can select and configure their vehicle online, obtaining a print-out of the exact price and specification. Those who are unsure can enter details of their various requirements and have a Renault product recommended to them by the system.

For existing Renault customers there's the option of booking a service online. The system automatically recognises the vehicle as well as service required and gives an instant online quotation. Users can then shop around for a better quote at other Renault dealerships or book the service instantly with direct access to the dealership's workshop diary. There's also a facility to book test drives in Renault minibus products online and a forum where Renault customers can share information (or vent their spleens).

Expect to hear more about the site soon with a £300,000 e-mail marketing campaign already running and Renault Vans sponsoring Virgin Radio's travel news from the beginning of May. A second site with special features aimed specifically at fleet managers is due to be launched this summer.

Change at the top heralds a new look

With a fresh perspective, the Community Transport Association's new CEO says he'll be broadening the CTA's remit. Lucy Tennyson reports

There are winds of change at the CTA, the charity that represents hundreds of voluntary and community-based transport schemes across the UK.

In the first change at the top in over 10 years, chief executive Keith Halstead took over from Jenny Meadows a year ago.

Jenny, who came from the grassroots of the sector, having set up and run community minibus operations in the 1970s and 80s, had steered the charity through a period of rapid growth, with the number of CT schemes growing and consolidating, especially in rural England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales.

Keith, 45, comes with sound charity management credentials, having worked for the National Trust for 18 years, latterly as director of the Thames and Solent Region.

He takes over a buoyant CTA, with a staff of 30, and around 1,500 members. These range from car schemes and villages with one minibus taking pensioners on shopping trips, to major city dial-a-rides, and London projects with many minibuses and active trading arms.

In Keith, the CTA has opted for a new style of leadership, one that reflects the charity's intention to position itself more visibly as a proponent of social inclusion.

"The role of the CTA is to support our members in delivering social change," he says. "We have been playing that key role for many years, but what I want to do now is broaden the agenda. For us, it's not just about transport and vehicles.

"Vehicles are a means to an end. I want to demonstrate just how many more agendas CT is delivering on – for instance, health, social inclusion, and community regeneration."

There are several visible indications of the vision Keith has for a more campaigning CTA. A mission statement appears for the first time in the recently revamped magazine – now renamed the CTA Journal – to set the agenda. It states: 'The CTA is a rapidly-growing national charity giving voice and providing leadership, learning and enterprise support to member organisations which are delivering innovative transport solutions to achieve social change'.

Left: Keith Halstead. Top right: The Lincolnshire-based inter connect project works in partnership with local operators to provide on-demand services. Last year it won over £700,000 in Kickstart funding. Below right: Metro, the West Yorkshire PTE, has awarded 15 of its new yellow school bus routes to CT plus, the trading arm of Hackney Community Transport

A new logo and corporate identity complete the picture, while, next month, the organisation launches its first long-term planning document, bringing it in line with other major charities. A New Direction: CTA UK Strategic Plan 2006-2009 will be available at *www.ctauk.org* from the end of June.

More clues to the changes ahead lie in the editorials Keith now pens in each issue of the Journal. It is clear he wishes the CTA to have a strong voice at government level and influence the way local services are delivered following the upcoming local government reform.

He writes: "The new agenda for local government and the roll-out of local area agreements across the whole of England by 2007 will change the local democratic network as we know it. How should the voluntary and community transport network respond to these changes?

> **"Vehicles are a means to an end. I want to demonstrate just how many more agendas CT is delivering on, for instance, health, social inclusion, and regeneration"**

"Most of our members are organisations that are embedded in the communities they serve. This is what shapes, so powerfully, the voluntary and community transport network, and explains why it is so well positioned to provide services that focus on the local, on one-to-one help, on being innovative."

But, at the same time, he makes it clear that not all CT schemes are the same. While there are community transport operators that "are enterprise-orientated and eagerly await the reforms", many are not "contract ready" and others never wish to be.

A social enterprise model

Do those enterprise-orientated schemes represent a 'threat' to the commercial sector? Keith doesn't think so. "I think many of our members wish to develop their enterprise orientation, but their main concern is to add value to the service they provide. They work very much on a social enterprise model."

The Social Enterprise Coalition defines social enterprises as 'dynamic businesses with a social purpose working all around the UK and internationally to deliver lasting social and environmental change'. Well-known social enterprises include *The Big Issue* and the Eden Project.

CT operators such as Hackney and ECT in London have shown how community transport operators can go down the same route, earning income through their own activities, for example by winning local authority contracts, rather than relying on grants and donations.

Competition is healthy, says Keith, and he believes there is room for everyone when it comes to competing for transport tenders. "It's a market place, and the CT operator has a right to be there, too," he states.

There is much debate at the CTA about how far community operators should go in bidding for contracts to deliver public services. CTA Journal editor Julie Pybus explores the issues in the current issue, pointing out pitfalls, such as the potential exploitation of volunteers.

ADAPT, an accessible transport provider for disabled people based in Northumberland, lost out to the private sector when bidding for school contracts. Commercial operators were considered to offer best value for money. In contrast, in West Yorkshire, the PTE has awarded 15 of its new yellow school bus routes to CT Plus, which is the trading arm of Hackney Community Transport. Other routes have gone to First and the Huddersfield-based commercial operator, Teamdeck.

> **I think many of our members wish to develop their enterprise orientation, but their main concern is adding value to the service they provide**

She concludes that public service delivery "will be an important role for the community transport organisations of the future".

Keith Halstead believes that the key difference is the "additionality" his members can bring to public service delivery. "However, I'm always open to discussion on these issues. I think we should see if there are ways it might be possible to work together with commercial operators to achieve a more integrated transport network. For example, I'd like to meet the Confederation of Passenger Transport, and I am willing to have a dialogue with anyone who wishes to work with CTA and our members."

Looking ahead, he says he wishes the CTA to have a far broader remit, linking with other charities providing transport to fulfil their own purposes. He would like to see expansion at the grassroots level, supporting members that ›

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might include a church with one minibus, or even a boat service to a remote Scottish Island.

"Looking at Hampshire, for example, a recent study estimated there must be at least 500 groups involved in running community transport services. They include scout groups, schools and care homes. We want to support the charities that have just one vehicle, along with the big social enterprises."

CTA offers a wide range of support to its members, including advice on the traffic regulations, charity legislation, minibus operation, how to transport passengers with mobility difficulties, and passenger safety. It runs regular training events, as well as the UK's largest voluntary and community transport event in Manchester, and inputs to numerous government consultation exercises. It has offices in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, as well as London and a central office at Manchetser.

Section 19

Some commercial operators have been critical of the Section 19 small bus permit system which allows not-for-profit organisations to operate minibuses and charge their members for travel, providing the service is not offered to the general public. In response, Keith says the requirements of Section 19 are identical on maintenance standards and the CTA manages a national driver training scheme, MiDAS, which is celebrating its 10th year, with 100,000 drivers having gone through the programme to date. Standards are extremely high, and MiDAS drivers have to go through regular refresher courses, says Keith.

A good safety record in the community sector is reflected in the low claims rate, and the low insurance premium the CTA has been able to secure with its insurer HSBC, he adds.

Keith has also brought about changes to the CTA's flagship annual event and exhibition, which takes place at G-Mex, Manchester, from October 10-12. A high-profile one-day conference has been introduced, the 2006 theme being 'Is public transport a public service?' It is hoped commercial operators and others will attend and join in the debate on this important issue. The one-day conference reflects his wish to turn the CTA into a more strategic organisation. "I want the CTA to act more strategically. We have appointed directors for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland who will drive policy issues in those countries."

Although the CTA is striving to position itself as an influential national charity, it is still a far cry from the National Trust, with 3.4 million members. Why did he leave a very secure career for perhaps a more risky option with the CTA?

"I wanted a challenge and I was looking for an organisation which I could move forward. The CTA has completed one period of growth, and now I believe it's time for another. I want to increase membership, and lobby hard on policy issues."

> The CTA has completed one period of growth and now I believe it's time for another

Above: ECT, or Ealing Community Transport, started life in 1979 as part of Ealing Voluntary Service Council with just four vehicles. Twenty seven years later it has a £50m turnover, and employs 1,100 people. Left: The CTA provides regular training sessions for members, from how to transport passengers with mobility problems to how to deal with emergency situations.

Keith, who lives with his young family in Oxfordshire, studied building and civil engineering and began his career as an assistant traffic engineer at Norwich City Council. "A constant in my career has been working for the public benefit," he says.

"Social inclusion and the role of the third sector is now back on the government agenda, it's something we are all going to hear a lot more about. Big changes are taking place, and the CTA has got to be involved at the heart of it. It is a very exciting time, and there are lots of challenges for CTA and our members. We have a vital part to play if we are going to achieve our vision of a society free of social exclusion and injustice where everyone has the mobility they require."

IVECO DAILY EURO IV

Iveco Daily moves to Euro IV

The first new Iveco Daily models will be coming to the UK in the next few weeks, but they won't be available in bulk until August/September - just ahead of the implementation date for new emissions legislation in October

Launched in Turin last week - under the marketing banner 'Professional DNA' - the new Daily represents a major step forward in driveline technology for the manufacturer and the vehicles, complete with a front and rear-end restyling package by Giorgetto Giugiaro, and will all feature higher standard specification for as little as a 1.0% price increase on current prices. The relation to DNA is Iveco's way of stating the Daily, introduced in 1978, not only has a strong heritage, it has continually evolved through an engineered process and maintained the ability to perform competitively in an aggressive market.

An ESP electronic stability programme (ESP 8) has been included in the specification options. On the Iveco Daily it will only be standard on higher weight models. Irisbus feels it will probably specify all its own models with ESP as standard, but a final decision on that has yet to be taken. Given that it is standard on all Mercedes, VW and Ford minibuses, it is highly likely Irisbus will follow suit.

The new range, including chassis cowls and panel vans, has been extended to include various length options, weight capacities of up to 6.5 tonnes and gives the Daily a highly versatile product portfolio - with up to 3,000 different options. The chassis construction retains its traditional scaled-down truck design and componentry, with non-deformable side members, as Iveco feels this makes it simpler and easier for fitting a wide range of commercial bodies.

The chassis frame support with flat chassis platform also forms a good base for any type of interior fittings. Numerous bodywork fittings are available for each chassis version. They can reach up to 7t GVW, 8.6m in length and offer 28-passenger vehicle capacity. The range offers numerous versions which are equipped with various solutions for transporting passengers of varying mobility.

There are two main contenders in the engine line-up - the 2.3-litre and 3.0-litre Euro IV units with a spread of power outputs to match their chosen application and a choice of five or six-speed manual gearboxes combined with a dash-mounted gearchange. The 3.0-litre engine variant also provides the option of the AGile gearbox - an automated manual transmission delivering full automatic mode and a manual change option using sequential selection.

Engines

Iveco's 2.3-litre .14 engine is now equipped with a variable geometry turbine to make the EGR system compliant with Euro IV requirements and the exhaust also contains a DPF particulate filter.

The 3.0-litre engines, available as an option in all versions across the range, have increased torque and power output. The 3.0 HPI version today offers up to 146 bhp and 350 Nm torque. The same unit but with a variably geometry turbine, the 3.0 HPT, delivers an impressive 176bhp with 400 Nm maximum torque between 1,250 and 3,000 rpm - which Iveco claims is a 'best in class' achievement.

Above left: Low doors with plenty of storage space and a low window line for improved vision. Above right: New dashboard with joystick-style gear change

The 2.3-litre is available in 96, 116 or 136 bhp ratings and 3.0-litre engines develop 146 or 176 bhp. All five turbodiesel engines are four-cylinder in-line configuration with four valves per cylinder, and are directly operated by a double overhead camshaft with hydraulic tappet control. They all employ common rail technology, so injection pressure does not depend on the engine's rpm but is managed independently by an electronic control device. The system optimises combustion via an instantaneous fuel pilot injection resulting in increased performance and reduced specific consumption, while delivering efficient emission control.

In order to reduce downtime and operating costs by increasing productivity, oil and filters require changing every 40,000km. The 2.3-litre adopts a toothed distribution belt with a 240,000km or 5-year replacement interval. The 3.0-litre uses a 'lifetime guaranteed' distribution chain which has been tested successfully up to 350,000km.

Iveco says its implementation to Euro IV has led fuel consumption to suffer by 2-3%, but this figure has been kept to a minimum because of the strong torque the engines develop and the efficient new overdrive gearboxes with internal ratios sympathetic to the torque curve. The frontal design of the Daily is also more aerodynamic - which aids lower consumption.

Comfort

Comfort and ergonomics have always been a strong point of the Daily and the revised cab, also designed by Giugiaro, improves driver ergonomics and ease of movement across ›

IVECO
DA 057 DF

IVECO DAILY EURO IV

the cabin, accreditable to the dash-mounted gearshift and shorter handbrake with a lighter action. The cab seats are even more comfortable and provide greater support, while the interior remains spacious and practical to manage through the increased amount of storage space.

The driver's seat on the launch models was a fully adjustable Isringhausen unit adjustable for lateral distance, height, pitch and suspension damping. The dashboard layout doesn't differ much from the previous model but it remains reasonably attractive and functions adequately. Iveco says it will offer two dashboard options with a higher specification version having a larger display area and the ability to present the driver with a considerable amount of information concerning the on-board functions. This unit will also allow the option of installing a satellite navigation system complete with messaging facility and full Bluetooth compatibility. A CD player is standard with the radio equipment and the enhanced version also includes an MP3 player.

Driver and passenger comfort is further enhanced by features such as the parking sensor, loading area lighting system integrated into the third brake light and auxiliary heater with timer for programmable activation.

On the road

My first experience of the new Daily was in a drop-side truck with a crew cab. Equipped with a 3.0 HPI 146bhp engine, it proved remarkably quiet and wonderfully responsive. It also quickly became apparent how good the new brakes were. Iveco claim they stop the vehicles from 100km/h in just 42 metres, I didn't quite need that facility - but it's nice to know it has good capability. Despite being powerful the brakes have a very positive feel. They only require moderate pedal pressure and deliver excellent feedback.

Handling and roadholding were very good. The independent front suspension soaked up pot holes and speed humps effortlessly and the vehicle was stable and predictable.

The five-speed manual gearbox proved a nice balance on this Daily, which was carrying a full payload. The change is short and crisp but requires a short period of acclimatisation to avoid making selection errors. However, it proved how gutsy the engine was and that it was possible to pull away in third under load with very few revs and no clutch slipping.

On city and country roads it behaved very well and this also transferred to the motorway where it coped with high-speed operation with equal competence.

The 136 bhp engine in a high-roof 3.5 tonne panel van, my next encounter, exhibited similar qualities. The engine is more than adequate for most tasks and with five gears it remains very flexible.

The 116 bhp version that followed featured a medium roof and a six-speed gearbox. Closer ratios called for swifter gearchange intervals but it was very easy to select a gear ideally suited to the current road conditions and match traffic speed with a gear that allowed quick throttle response. The change action seemed a little lighter than on the five speed.

The smallest offering, a standard roof 2.9 tonne 29.12 also had six gears and remained capable of keeping with its larger stablemates under most conditions.

Overall ride quality across the board was very good. Driver vision was good and the newly-styled mirrors offer a good view of both sides and the road behind. The new mirrors are large and quite prominent but they hinge backwards easily.

Turning circle figures weren't available at the launch but they seemed to be good. All were highly manoeuvrable.

Although Iveco has stuck rigidly to a rear-wheel drive format it has now made a conscious attempt to supply the new range with its Agile gearbox. Launched almost two years ago it is available on all 3.0 litre HPI or HPT models. The automated manual can be placed in automatic mode and driven like any other auto. The shifts are made independently by the electronic control unit and governed by the load on the engine dependent on the throttle position. It times the changes to occur at the optimum place. The operation is timed so no slip occurs, saving fuel and clutch wear.

Drivers not wanting to rely on automatic operation can select the manual mode and by nudging the gearstick forwards or backwards can make 'clutchless' sequential changes up or down the box.

Top: The latest Irisbus Daily is a real head-turner. Above left: A very full engine compartment allows easy access for regular checks. Above right: Fully adjustable driver's seat is wide and comfortable

Dailybus

Unfortunately, the Daily launch did not extend to having minibuses available for a test drive. The nearest we got was a 'Combi' - which at least had the rear air suspension common to the Irisbus range specification. The ride quality on this was not perceptibly different under the brief test conditions afforded to us but it did seem there was slightly less body roll - not that there's anything significant anyway - and it perhaps stayed more level when cornering.

However, a coach conversion was on static display and proved quite a head-turner.

The new styling was enhanced by the addition of dark tinted windows, full height electro-pneumatic entrance door and a specially designed grille. The interior was pleasantly appointed with two-plus-one seating, full-length luggage

Above left: Electro-pneumatic coach-style entrance door. Above right: Large mirrors give excellent view. Left: Compact centre console. Right: Well-finished saloon interior

racks, air con and moulded trim covered in brushed PVC.

Electrics

Meeting Euro IV requirements also calls for on-board diagnostics capability and so the latest generation multiplex electrical and electronics system, based on CAN-BUS architecture, simplifies traditional wiring and requires fewer connections. The improved diagnostics interface and new functions form a platform for future development including satellite navigation, hands-free Bluetooth radio with MP3 player and wireless interface communications.

Customer opting for the new ESP 8 stability package will find it is the latest version which is load-adaptive - and alters its response dependent on where the centre of gravity has shifted to.

This means if there is a load shift or passengers move around to different seats, the weight distribution is automatically calculated and applied in any operation calling on the ESP functions. Incorporated in the ESP 8 is a 'hill holder' facility which will allow a vehicle to stand, without rolling backwards when at rest on an incline.

During hill acceleration, the control unit responds when it senses the vehicle is in first gear, with brake pedal and clutch depressed. It maintains pressure on the front brake callipers for around 1.5 seconds after release of the pedal, allowing the driver to set off with ease. During downhill starts from first gear, the Hill Holder function remains inactive. The opposite is true when in reverse gear: the system is activated during downhill starts and deactivated during uphill starts.

Conclusion

Given that Iveco invested considerably in a facelift for the Daily just two years ago it is not difficult to see why the latest model relies on a styling exercise rather than a complete re-make. However, a lot of the major changes are invisible and they have raised the ante in the marketplace.

All the contenders for market position that have launched their Euro IV models seem to have done a remarkable job in providing engines with loads of torque, advanced safety features and higher specification levels. They're all saying: "we mean business".

It's almost too close to call. Daily has some positive aspects Ford can't match and yet the Transit scores over the Daily in other areas. The Sprinter and Crafter sit alongside them with equally attractive specifications, strong reputations and a number of pluses and minuses. It all makes it very confusing for the customer.

The truth is, there doesn't seem to be a bad one among them and buyers won't go far wrong whichever way they choose.

Daily holds its own with the other contenders and there seems to be moves afoot to gain a stronger market presence. Iveco itself is now entering the off-the-peg minibus market with single model from the Daily range. While this may simplify purchasing for some buyers it looks like a repeat of the confusion existing between Mercedes-Benz' own-branded minibuses and those supplied through EvoBus. It begs the question 'are EvoBus and Irisbus strictly necessary if the manufacturers seem happy to do it themselves anyway?'

FACT FILE

Specification Iveco Daily Euro IV
Engines: 2.3-litre (96, 116 or 136 bhp), 3.0-litre (146 or 176 bhp)
Gross vehicle weight: 3200/ 3500/ 4200/ 4600/ 5200 kg
Gearbox: five or six-speed
Wheelbase: 3000/ 3300/ 3950 mm
Length: 5077/ 5477/ 5997/ 7012 mm
Max payload: 1060 to 5200 kg
Height: 1545/ 1900/ 2100/ mm
Volume: 7.3/ 8.3/ 9/ 10.2/ 13.2/ 15.6/ 17.2 m^2

WE LIKED

- Attractive looks
- Comfortable seats
- Gutsy engine
- Excellent brakes
- Broad product range

WE DISLIKED

- Nothing significant

Deliveries

Have you taken delivery of a new vehicle and want to tell the world about it? Email all the details and pictures to *martin.cole@rouncymedia.co.uk* or write to the address on page 3

CARRIAGEWAYS

Davina Cooper, who trades as Carriageways, has bought a second Sitcar Beluga from Moseley PCV.

Based in Landbeach, near Cambridge, Mrs Cooper and husband Chris now operate two of the high-specification minicoaches and concentrate entirely on private hires. The first Beluga was purchased last year. Both vehicles have replaced Optare Nouvelles.

Carriageways began trading five years ago and has just renewed its licences.

The Beluga is based on a Mercedes-Benz O815 DT chassis with a 152bhp engine and a ZF 5S-42 manual geabox. It features rear air suspension and the foundation brakes are supported by a Telma CC80 electromagnetic retarder. Carriageways specified 29 reclining seats plus a courier seat with leather headrest inserts, leather piping and three-point seat belts. The vehicle is also air conditioned and has tinted double glazing, a combined water boiler/fridge unit, audio/PA/CD systems with DVD player and monitor, carpeted entrance and gangway plus a moquette-trimmed engine cover.

Mrs Cooper said: "We really like the Beluga. It has proved to be very reliable and it has been a sound upgrade to our fleet. We had no hesitation in going for another one this time.

"By sticking to private hires we can pick and choose our work to some extent so we don't suffer from vandalism or drunken louts. A lot of our clients are older people who enjoy riding in a quality vehicle."

WMSNT

Volkswagen LT coachbuilt minibuses continue to dominate the West Midland Special Needs Transport fleet, but this year also sees the introduction of three new Tucanas from Bluebird Vehicles.

The Birmingham-based charity has placed orders for 34 Volkswagen LT35 minibuses and three Volkswagen Transporter-based Tucanas.

Tucana's spacious coachbuilt origins stem from a Zugkopf. This is a unusual arrangement of two Transporter cabs bolted back to back, and which is used for transport at the Volkswagen Commercial Vehicles's factory in Hanover. Scarborough-based Bluebird Vehicles constructs the Tucana using the driveline and braking units of the front-wheel drive Volkswagen Transporter, adding a corrosion-resistant steel structure, a low composite floor and an independent rear kneeling suspension.

Powered by 2.5-litre 130bhp diesel engines, the three Volkswagen Tucanas have been built to WMSNT's specification and feature 14 passenger seats, ten of which can be removed, and four fixed tip-and-fold seats. Wheelchair access is achieved by means of a folding ramp via the rear doors, used when the rear suspension is lowered.

Fleet Manager for WMSNT, Paul Elverson, said: "The Volkswagen Transporter Tucana brought together a number of elements we required in one vehicle including the low floor, automatic transmission, ease of access at the front, and rear air suspension allowing the safe and easy boarding

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of wheelchairs."

The three Volkswagen Tucana and 34 LT35 minibuses are used to carry 265 children - 60 of whom are in wheelchairs - who attend the Calthorpe Specialist Sports College in Birmingham. The children all have special educational needs, so to enable them to easily identify the minibus taking them home, the light blue Calthorpe College fleet has been given a distinctive sports symbol livery.

This latest order increases the number of Volkswagen minibuses in the WMSNT fleet to 286. The Calthorpe College contract represents a new dimension to the service provided by WMSNT, which maintains its position as the UK's largest provider of door-to-door transport services for people with mobility problems.

DUBMIRE TRAVEL

Dubmire Travel of Hetton-le-Hole, Tyne & Wear, has taken delivery of a Sitcar Beluga from Moseley PCV.

Equipped with 33 fixed passenger seats, air conditioning, tinted double glazing and a radio/PA/CD system, the Beluga is based on a Mercedes-Benz O815 DT chassis with a 152bhp engine and a ZF 5S-42 manual gearbox. It comes with an electro-pneumatic plug-type entrance door and has a separate driver's door with an electrically-operated and heated window.

Dubmire Travel began operating five years ago and has a fleet of six, with five full-sized coaches. The new addition replaces a short Javelin and was chosen because it provided the ideal capacity for mid-range party hires and had the facility of a large boot. The company's excursion and holidays are run by Miss Kelly Jordison and the operational side is run by transport manager Paul Reekie.

Mr Reekie said: "The Javelin was ageing a bit too much to be used on quality work. We needed a replacement that could cope with the same capacity and the Beluga filled the slot."

HORSEMAN

Horseman Coaches of Reading has now purchased over 50 Optimo minicoaches with the delivery of three new Optimo V models.

The latest additions to fleet were supplied direct from Optimo Caetano in Portugal and are equipped with 22 seats, courier seat, MAC air conditioning system and tinted glazing.

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Why all the accidents?

I'm a big fan of *CBW*, but must you mention every road traffic accident that involves coaches and buses?

Car fleet magazines don't mention all the car crashes. It just bothers me that anyone seeing the magazine would get the impression that PSVs are crashing into things and injuring people all the time when, as we all know, it's rare.

Brian Jewell, Rotherham

***CBW* says: It's a good point, but you have almost answered it yourself. Part of our duty to inform includes mentioning rare events.**

We are also keen to look at the anatomy of PSV accidents because the outcome can often be positive. The industry has a safety record of which it can rightly be very proud, but that should not mean sweeping problems under the carpet. Several recent incidents involving children either falling from emergency doors or mishaps through bad behaviour underline the great many accidents which occur through no fault of the operator or driver. It's important the industry makes it plain that there is also a duty of care on passengers not to misuse what are otherwise vehicles with a peerless safety record.

I share your view of black cabs

I fully agree with your comments on the "iconic" London Taxi.

Taxi licensing authorities throughout the UK (some 450 of them!) have what seems to me to be a blinkered view of the requirements of the PASSENGERS of taxis.

More and more the conditions of construction of even provincial taxis are such that the vehicles acceptable to new licensing applications are steered toward the dreaded "black cab."

These vehicles are very expensive (up to £30,000). They appear somewhat crude in comparison with the modern sophisticated motor vehicles. There are a few alternatives, usually van conversions and these are in my opinion, worse than the TXi.

My company in Chelmsford - Group Taxibus Ltd. (mentioned in a recent *CBW* article on NVQ courses) operates four new TXi taxis. The only possible points in favour of these vehicles are that they are instantly recognisable (ergo the iconic stature of the vehicle) and the depreciation factor which is probably the lowest of all motor vehicles.

I doubt that your magazine is read by many taxi operators or Licensing Officers. If they did, you might have a significant debate on your hands.

Richard Matthews, Excellent Connections, Stansted, Essex

LETTER OF THE WEEK

I'm afraid I have to take issue with Mr Dasey (Letter of the Week *CBW*, May 3).

Like many other operators, we actively encourage those of more 'mature years' to join our staff. We find that older people can bring a whole host of experience with them, not just in our industry, but in a wide variety of areas. Also, it is generally the case that a more senior driver can relate far better to the older passengers who frequent buses and coaches all over the county.

Much is written in the trade press about driver shortages. A large part of this is down to the fact that our industry struggles to meet the earning requirements of a thirty-something, who has two or three children and a mortgage. However, older people tend to be much more stable employees, and are less inclined to jump ship for the sake of a few more pence an hour. Also, there are not many people in the 50-plus bracket who suddenly have to take time off because of child care problems.

You do have to accept that when someone gets towards the latter days of their working lives they will be less inclined to work a full week. After a long working life nobody will begrudge them a couple of days a week with the grandchildren or in the garden. A good work/life balance helps to make them much happier in their jobs.

My message to other employers would be to embrace the older generation. Feel free to tap into what can be a rich seam of experience and expertise.

Roland Eglinton, Operations manager, Chalkwell Coach Hire & Tours, Sittingbourne, Kent

WIN A BUS! Sort of... Drop us a line and if your letter is chosen as our Letter of the Week, you'll receive a top-notch coach or bus model courtesy of our friends at Corgi. Please try to keep your letters under 200 words. The editor's decision is final.

***CBW* is the only paid-for weekly news magazine for the coach and bus industry. Each week the magazine provides a unique insight. Your views are always welcome. Write to the editor at the above address.**

5 YEARS AGO **Transbus agrees to reverse its decision to close the Plaxton coach building facility in Scarborough, but 500 job losses are still on the cards.**

10 YEARS AGO **In a landmark deal, Shearings' Wigan workshops transferred to Volvo control, and having paved the way in the truck market, Volvo now offers coach and bus operators tempting packages to take the pain out of buying and operating mobile fixed assets.**

20 YEARS AGO **The Belgian Ambassador, Mr Jean Paul Van Bellinghen attended the Official opening of Jonckheere UK Ltd's headquarters in Northampton. The launch of the new premises looked set to add to the 600 Roeselare built examples already running in the UK at the time.**

Rush bid halted for good

Controversial brother and sister will never gain a new operator's licence says traffic commissioner

The application by John Rush and his sister Margaret Gray to obtain a new operator's licence, always looked difficult as they both faced the North Eastern Area traffic commissioner Brigadier Tom Macartney at a public inquiry, which was reported in March (*CBW* March 29).

Now, a written decision from the traffic commissioner, seems to have finally ended the whole Rush Travel saga, which has rolled on for over three years.

At the end of a complicated inquiry, Brigadier Macartney found that Mrs Gray lacked the repute to become transport manager, while Mr Rush lacked the necessary good repute to be the holder of an operator's licence.

Their application for a new standard national licence authorising two vehicles, in the name of John Rush, trading as J Rush Coach Hire, would have had Mrs Gray as transport manager, and be based at Brenkley Yard, Brenkley Way, Blezzard Business Park, Seaton Burn, Newcastle upon Tyne - the same premises where both Rush Travel and A Coach company had been based.

At the public inquiry, Brigadier Macartney expressed his displeasure at the applicants' history, as both were disqualified directors of the Rush Travel company, whose licence had been revoked twice, following four public inquiries between January 10, 2003 and March 15, 2005.

He also questioned them closely as to their involvement in the 'phoenix operator' A Coach, which was refused a new licence at the end of last year.

The relevant evidence which was considered at the public inquiry had been set out in detail in the call-up letter, including:

1 A public inquiry on January 10, 2003, as a result of which a number of undertakings were given and a condition was imposed that, "the directors of Rush Travel Limited shall exercise managerial control of the business in person".

2 A public inquiry on May 21, 2004 as a result of which a formal warning was issued, the company's repute was tarnished and a number of conditions were imposed on the licence.

3 A public inquiry on December 15, 2004 as a result of a failure to comply with undertakings, prohibition notices being imposed, convictions sustained, a breach of condition imposed on a licence, the operation without a transport manager and consideration of good repute. It was decided that the good repute of the company was lost and the licence was revoked with effect from February 5, 2005. The company and its directors were disqualified from holding or obtaining an operator's licence for six months.

4 A public inquiry on March 15, 2005 as a result of maintenance difficulties, a failure to pay attention to finances as promised at Public Inquiry on December 15, 2004, the absence of a transport manager for a protracted period and a multiple breach of conditions imposed on the licence.

The licence was revoked with effect from March 15, 2005, and the good repute of the operator was forfeited. The operator and its two directors, Mr Rush and Mrs Gray, were disqualified from holding or obtaining an operator's licence in any traffic area indefinitely.

Those involved in this deception are unfit to hold an operator's licence

Traffic commissioner, Tom Macartney

This decision was appealed to the Transport Tribunal. The appeal was dismissed and it was ordered that the decision would take effect from 23.59 on May 27, 2005

The traffic commissioner said that Mr Rush and Mrs Gray had been reminded that there had been significant problems in the past, which had made it necessary to disqualify both of the directors from holding an operator's licence in any traffic area. Drivers had been allowed to drive vehicles without being properly qualified, school children were being conveyed in vehicles which were not receiving daily driver defect checks and in one case, in such a dangerous condition that it was a memorable case for all those who were involved. A list of convictions incurred by the old firm was particularly serious and Rush Travel Ltd had deliberately broken conditions imposed at public inquiry. Operation without a transport manager was apparent over a protracted period, and the managerial control and involvement, which was a specific condition imposed in an effort to ensure better management of the fleet, never did take place, despite several public inquiries.

He said that Mr Rush was unable to describe any concrete measures to allay concerns, apart from repeating his desire to improve in future.

Referring to Mrs Gray, he said that he was concerned about her role as transport manager to Alexander Van Klaveren, after Rush Travel was disqualified from the industry.

She had stated that she was aware that it was wrong for Mr Van Klaveren to use a Scottish licence while operating in the North Eastern Traffic Area, and claimed that she had informed Mr Van Klaveren that there was a need to regularise the position, but was vague about other aspects of her role and the nature of the relationship between herself and Mr Van Klaveren.

"Mrs Gray was told that there was grave concern over her ability to act as an effective transport manager, in view of the past history of the firm when she was a director. She was unable to shed light on the way in which she would operate in future, apart from her promise to check tachographs in the future," he said.

The application by A Coach Company (NE) Ltd had been described in the call-up letter.

"It had been a finding of fact at the public inquiry for A Coach Company on November 15, 2005 that A Coach Company was a phoenix for Rush Travel Ltd and the application was a sham and was a deliberate attempt to deceive a traffic commissioner," he said

"Mr Rush and Mrs Gray were referred particularly to roadside checks carried out by VOSA in June, July, August and October 2005. Examples taken at

Key points

- **Directors Mr Rush and Mrs Gray had previously been disqualified indefinitely from holding or obtaining an operator's licence**
- **A pheonix application in 2005 was "a sham intended to deceive the traffic commissioner"**
- **"I find it difficult to imagine them ever being fit to return to the PCV industry," ruled the commissioner**

random involved A967 SYE displaying the 'O' Licence disc for Alexander Van Klaveren: Licence PM1012847. This licence is registered to a Scottish operator based in Sir Harry Lauder Street in Edinburgh.

Mr Rush and Mrs Gray were unable to explain how this operator could possibly be legitimately sub-contracted to carry out school contracts in the Sunderland area every morning and afternoon.

Nor could either party identify how the transport manager for that operator was able to exercise continuous and effective responsibility for those journeys using a vehicle provided by RTL & Tours Ltd and a driver provided by RTL Travel & Tours Ltd.

"The driver was domiciled and employed in the Sunderland area. Neither Mr Rush nor Mrs Gray were able to assist me in demonstrating that this was anything other than the loan of a disc held on margin by an operator who was not genuinely carrying out the work. The whole exercise appeared to be a deliberate deceit and sham to allow a revoked operator, disqualified from the industry, to continue functioning illegally.

"Mr Rush and Mrs Gray were invited to convince me that they had been operating properly and that my conclusions were mistaken. Both Mr Rush and Mrs Gray were unable to present any arguments to do so. I find that Mrs Gray, who was a director of Rush Travel Ltd and RTL Travel & Tours Ltd, lacks the good repute necessary to function in the role of transport manager in this application, or on any licence application.

"Mrs Gray's attitude to the function of transport manager is cavalier in the extreme and, given problems which were known to her in the past, as a director of a small firm, I have no confidence that she is willing or capable of improvement.

"Mrs Gray is not fit to be involved in any operator's licence anywhere in the country and this application is refused on the grounds of a lack of professional competence," stated the traffic commissioner.

"Mr Rush has previously been disqualified from holding or obtaining an operator's licence in any traffic area indefinitely. Mr Rush has applied to re-enter the industry, despite a track record, which is awful.

Traffic commissioner Brigadier Tom Macartney

"Mr Rush has failed to convince me that he is ready or able to re-enter the industry. I make this statement without considering the activities of Rush Travel Ltd and Mr Rush after May 27, 2005 when his licence was finally revoked.

"After May 27, 2005, Mr Rush continued to operate under an illegal scheme, which was designed to conceal and obfuscate the continued operation by Mr Rush using his drivers and his vehicles, while borrowing discs from a variety of other operators illegally.

"This was a deliberate attempt to circumvent the regulatory regime using A Coach Company (NE) Ltd as a phoenix to camouflage the true nature of the business. Those involved in such deceptions are unfit to hold an operator's licence.

"Mr Rush and Mrs Gray have exacerbated my low opinion of their repute. I find it difficult to imagine them ever being fit to return to the PCV industry," he concluded.

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Beating the Ban

A *CBW* guide to preserving your (and your driver's) driving licence

With the ever-increasing number of speed cameras and enforcement devices on our roads professional drivers face an important task in avoiding penalty point endorsements on their licence. Accordingly, the modern driver will need to be both vigilant and knowledgeable in order to protect themselves from the possibility of a disqualification and subsequent loss of livelihood.

In this week's *CBW*, we look at the penalty points system and explore some of the industry 'myths' in relation to disqualification in an attempt to help professional drivers retain their driving licence.

Q How does the penalty point system work?

A With over 5,000 fixed and mobile 'safety' cameras in the UK it is increasingly important that professional drivers know exactly how the penalty point system works.

The imposition of penalty points will of course vary depending on the nature of the motoring offence committed, with more serious offences attracting a higher number of points.

Minor speeding offences for example will usually be dealt with by way of a Fixed Penalty Notice and three points, while more serious offences will be dealt with at court and may result in between three and 11 penalty points being endorsed, depending on the offence committed.

If a driver incurs 12 penalty points in a three-year period then they will become a 'totter' and liable for automatic disqualification. One common myth widely held in the industry is that the relevant three-year period relates to the date of the driving conviction and not the date of the offence. Unfortunately for those who think that by delaying the hearing they can escape a ban this is not the case, as the three-year period relates to the date on which an offence was committed.

Many drivers will also not be aware that the statutory provisions impose a minimum period of disqualification of six months on any 'totter' with the magistrates having the discretion to extend the period of disqualification if they think it is necessary to do so.

Accordingly, pleas for leniency will almost definitely fall on deaf ears.

Therefore for any UK motorist who incurs 12 points, a financial penalty and the potential of a long driving disqualification are the likely outcome. Now, more than ever, drivers should be aware of the increased threat in prosecution and realise that it is no longer uncommon to accumulate offences in a short period and in doing so put their licence at risk.

Q I am a professional coach driver with eight points on my licence and have just been summoned to court for another offence. Is there anything I can do to avoid a long disqualification?

A Many drivers try to justify their actions. Such an argument will have limited or no merit and will not prevent the imposition of points and/or a subsequent disqualification if you become a "totter" if the court imposes four or more penalty points on you.

The courts can, however, look at the consequences of the period of disqualification and have the discretion, should they wish to exercise it, to either disqualify for a lesser period or not at all.

One such way to persuade the court to exercise its discretion is to successfully argue that exceptional hardship will result if you are disqualified. The definition of what constitutes exceptional hardship is a matter of fact and degree and will be for the courts to interpret in each individual case. However, as all orders for disqualification will entail some element of hardship, it is clear that to successfully argue the point the level of hardship must be significantly more than is normally suffered.

Although loss of employment will cause hardship this alone will often not be enough to satisfy the definition of exceptional hardship.

In order to improve the chances of successfully pleading the point, it is often best to also highlight the hardship that will be caused to persons other than the offender who are wholly innocent and will suffer if the offender is disqualified.

In most cases this will be the hardship caused to the family of the offender, for example if young children are unable to be driven to appointments, or if other family members are left vulnerable. The definition may also apply in limited circumstances to the effect on work colleagues or customers. For example, the loss of a licence for a doctor on call may well cause his patients exceptional hardship.

Such an argument is often particularly relevant to professional drivers and with specialist legal representation a driver may be able to preserve his licence. If the argument is accepted, points will still be endorsed on the licence, however the individual

Garth Hannaford is an experienced Solicitor in the Road Transport Team at Bond Pearce Solicitors who regularly appears before the Courts and at Public Inquiry. He can be contacted on 0845 415 6724 or by email garth.hannaford@bondpearce.com

will be allowed to continue driving even if they have 12 or more points.

Once the argument has been successfully used it cannot be used again for three years.

However, even if you successfully run the argument and show exceptional hardship, you may still fall foul of the Traffic Commissioner, who will have to determine whether you are still fit to hold PCV entitlement.

Q I am a professional coach driver and need to renew/or apply for my vocational entitlement. However, I have points on my licence – will this hinder my application?

A Most professional drivers will be aware that the Traffic Commissioner can either refuse an application for, or revoke the vocational entitlement required to, drive a coach or bus.

Unlike the court system which will take into account individual circumstances and the possible consequences of a disqualification, the Traffic Commissioner will only look at conduct when determining whether an applicant is fit to hold a PCV licence.

To ensure consistency and outline how conduct issues will be interpreted, the Traffic Commissioner has published a Practice Direction on driver conduct outlining the criteria that will be applied in assessing the 'fitness of applicants' to either apply for or renew a PCV or LGV entitlement.

To highlight the additional standards required by the Traffic Commissioner the following guidance is worth noting...

If an applicant (either renewal or first time) has nine or more points (excluding drink driving):

- Where the licence has been endorsed with points within the last six months, the applicant will be sent the 'minded to refuse' (for a period of six months) letter.
- Where penalty points were accumulated between a six-month and three-year period, applicants will usually have their applications granted but a letter will be sent emphasising the additional requirements and standards expected of a professional driver.

If you have been disqualified for the first time (excluding drink drive offences):

- Applicants whose disqualification has ended in the last six months will normally be sent the 'minded to refuse' (for a period of three months) letter.

The guidance also sets out the criteria applied to drivers who have committed other offences such as drink/drive offences as well as tachograph offences, drivers' hour's offences and other criminal offences.

Drivers will also need to be aware that they have a duty to report all motoring convictions to the Traffic Commissioner within 28 days and a failure to do so may result in quite serious action being taken.

In essence, the professional PCV driver must ensure that they remain within the law at all times as a failure to do so could lead to an appearance before the courts and the Traffic Commissioner with a potential revocation of PCV entitlement.

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FUEL MANAGEMENT PAYS OFF FOR REGIONAL COACH OPERATORS

Improvements to the depot fuelling facilities of Johnsons Coach Travel of Henley-in-Arden, Warwickshire, include the installation of a fuel management system supplied by MIS Fuel Monitoring of Wolverhampton. Based on a Merridale Auditor FS combined pump/monitor, the new system has a direct communications link to the office computer. This allows details of all fuelling transactions to be captured automatically, which is a significant benefit, improving reliability as well as saving administration time.

In operation, the vehicle drivers use a smart key to switch on and select the pump in use. Each fuelling transaction must then be authorised by entering the vehicle ID and vehicle odometer reading.

"Johnsons Coach provides scheduled bus services as well as its luxury travel operations," explains Peter Johnson, adding that accurate measurement of fuel usage is crucial to both sides of the business.

As a bus operator, the information is required for submission to local authorities and the Department of Transport for the provision of subsidised rural services. On the holiday excursions side, refuelling forms an integral part of the turnaround procedure.

In addition to the pumps and fuel management system, Johnsons has installed a new tank, which is fully bunded and meets the latest environmental standards for the storage of fuel oil. The servicing area has also been revised, allowing refuelling and toilet servicing to be carried out at a single location.

"As well as increasing capacity, we wanted to get more technical with our fuel records. To manage our current fleet size, we needed better quality management information," says Peter Johnson.

"Offsite fuel purchases can be brought in to the Merridale system to provide a complete history. We use this information to track variation in performance of vehicles and drivers. It's good news for the drivers because this measurement provides a sound basis on which to reward the drivers for achieving good fuel economy."

MIS Fuel Monitoring Ltd provides a total capability covering the design, manufacture, installation and support of the Merridale range of fuel management systems. Over 2000 systems have been installed and are operational throughout the UK and Ireland. More examples of customer applications may be found at *www.fuelmanagement.co.uk*. Further product information may be found at the company's web site *www.merridale.co.uk*.

The Merridale system installed at Johnsons Coach Travel has allowed the company to get more technical with its fuel management

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Terence Barker Ltd, established for over 40 years, is one of the country's leading manufacturers of bunded fuel storage tanks. They manufacture and hire bunded fuel tanks that comply fully with current legislation.

The company says it's now a "one stop quality shop" offering customers a total package, including supply-only or installed bunded tanks and custom-build units. They are available either rectangular or cylindrical, with or without the extra security of a roller shutter cabinet.

Also available is a decommissioning service, fuel pumps, fuel management systems, spares and repairs, site audits, and service contracts.

Fuel management systems have the facility to retrieve and record detailed reports of individual driver's fuel usage.

Terence Barker offers free demonstrations and training.

As a member of the steering committee that worked with CIRIA to produce the recommendations for the Oil Storage Regulations, and offering OFTEC-registered engineers, you can buy with confidence and be assured their tanks and services fully comply and are up to the highest standard working, to ISO 9001 quality assurance.

Don't wait until you have a pollution incident: if you have a leak no matter how small, it is already costing you money in lost fuel, not to mention clean-up costs and fines.

This Legislation has generated many questions relating to the facilitation of the regulations and the necessary build requirements.

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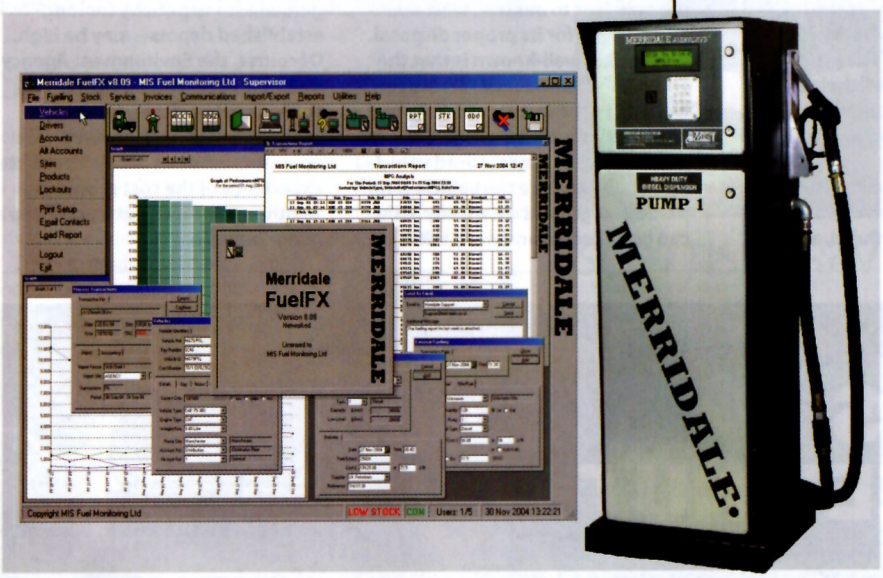

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COULD FUEL AND OIL COST MORE THAN YOU THINK? Some established operators could be sitting on an environmental time-bomb which could cost their business.

A whole raft of regulation which covers the storage, handling and disposal of fuels and lubricants now focuses on the environmental cost of spillage, and the more rural your depot's location, the more likely the ill-prepared operator is to find himself facing a huge bill should the worst happen.

Any operator close to a natural watercourse, including ditches, should be aware of the risks. A damaged fuel tank or simple run-off from the depot could send highly-visible pollution into streams and rivers, and an investigation by the Environment Agency will then identify any shortfalls in your system.

In general, all fuel and oil storage tanks must be 'bunded' – surrounded by a leak-proof structure – to contain their total capacity. Any taps and filler points should be contained within the bund.

Surface water drains cannot be used for any form of waste, including cleaning fluids, and in some areas, guidelines insist the surface water drainage system is self-contained and has built-in interceptors and alarms to collect any oil and to alert the operator to a major spillage.

Disposal of all waste oil is heavily regulated, and generally requires the operator to audit all waste oil and account for its proper disposal. What is less well-known is that the End of Life Vehicle (ELV) Directive went on to the statute recently, and now demands that the waste oil within scrap or cannibalised vehicles be removed where the vehicle is not parked on ground where any leaks can be collected and dealt with.

Indeed, the ELV regulation will prevent non-approved sites from dismantling vehicles in most circumstances, and even insists that vehicles in storage for, perhaps, restoration have all oil and fuel contaminants removed.

The cost of meeting the guidelines – especially for long-established depots – may be high. Of course, the Environment Agency does not have the manpower to check every industrial site for compliance, but there are operators who can speak from bitter experience of the cost should the weather or an accident cause even a minor pollution.

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Have you taken delivery of a new vehicle and want to tell the world about it? Email all the details and pictures to *cbwinbox@rouncymedia.co.uk* or write to the address on page 3

NEWBURY COACHES

Following a new B12M Paragon delivered last summer, which was the first brand-new coach purchased by the company in recent years, Newbury Coaches of Ledbury has just taken delivery of a second.

"I am very pleased with the performance of the Paragon delivered in 2005," says Newbury Coaches director Ken Powell, "and decided to take a second for 2006."

The new Paragon is an air-conditioned 53/57-seater – its first Paragon was a 49/53-seat executive – with the different specification reflecting the company's policy of providing different types of vehicles to meet its customers' varied needs

"We will be using it on a broad range of work," adds Ken Powell, "from UK holiday tours to local private hire and school work."

Newbury Coaches is one of Herefordshire's leading family-run coach businesses, and has been serving the region for 30 years. The company's new Volvo was supplied by Plaxton Coach Sales, and joins 14 others.

FACT FILE

Chassis/body Volvo B12M/ Plaxton Paragon
Engine Volvo D12C
Transmission Volvo 6-speed
Seats 53/57
Spec Air conditioning
Supplied by Plaxton, 01909 551166

ISLEWORTH COACHES

London-based Isleworth Coaches has taken delivery of a new Volvo B7R to accommodate its growing private hire business.

The Sunsundegui Sideral-bodied vehicle, which sports alloy wheels, also features the Volvo D7C 7-litre rear engine coupled to a ZF six-speed automatic gearbox. Inside, the 57 seats all have three point seat belts and passengers benefit from full climate control and a TV/video.

The vehicle joins the firm's 12-strong fleet specialising in school work and other private hire contracts in and around London, one of their major customers being the Metropolitan Police.

"We had not bought Volvo for a while," said General Manager Robin Waller, "but felt that the B7R was right for our requirements. It looks stylish, the passengers are very comfortable and we are very pleased with it."

FACT FILE

Chassis/body Volvo B7R/ Sunsundegui Sideral
Engine Volvo D7C 7-litre
Transmission ZF six-speed auto
Seats 57
Spec Climate control
Supplied by Volvo, 01926 414518

FELIX BUSES

Two Plaxton Paragons have gone on tour with Felix Bus Services, with an eye-catching livery which includes the famous cartoon cat.

The coaches are based on the EuroRider 35 chassis with Iveco's Cursor engine. They have 53 seats, and an inswing door: "The new coaches replace two Volvo B10M Plaxton Premiere 320s," said operations manager Ian Middup. "They are being used on our own holiday tours and day excursions."

Mr Middup said the move to the Ecomat 'box was based on its operating experience of buses: "I wanted gearboxes without a clutch. The semi-autos have clutches, even if electronics do control them.

"The drivers love them, and the passengers too. Their performance so far, delivering about 9.5 mpg, has been excellent."

FACT FILE

Chassis/body Irisbus Euro-Rider 35/Plaxton Paragon
Engine Iveco Cursor 310bhp
Transmission ZF Ecomat auto
Seats 53
Spec Climate Control
Supplied by Plaxton, 01909 551166

SCOTTISH TRAVEL

A new service connecting two of the largest hospitals on Clydeside is being operated by Scottish Travel of Greenock using a recently-acquired Optare Solo.

The 25-mile route links the Royal Alexandra Hospital at Paisley and the Inverclyde Royal Hospital. It's a three-year contracted service awarded by Strathclyde Passenger Transport and runs six times a day on weekdays and four times daily at the weekends.

As might be expected of a hospital service, the bus will regularly carry people in wheelchairs or with other mobility problems and it was the easy accessibility of Solo that persuaded the company that this was the right bus for the job.

"Passengers are delighted with the ease of access and the level of comfort. All-round air suspension ensures a smooth ride and the modern interior styling creates a bright and cheerful feel to the saloon that makes for a pleasant travelling experience," says Scottish Travel operations manager Robert Wilson Junior.

"As for the Solo's regular driver, Jim French, he just loves it! We opted for the higher-rated variant of the Mercedes-Benz engine and this gives Jim plenty of power to move off smoothly and maintain good average speeds once on the move.

"The engine is matched to a fully-automatic Allison 2000 series gearbox that he finds is easy to use and that has a good spread of gears to cope with all conditions. And the integral retarder is also a useful feature that contributes to reduced wear on the service brakes."

The new Solo is an 8.5 metre full-width model with 26 fixed seats and three tip-ups in the wheelchair bay. Seats are Richards and Shaw Harmony trimmed in a colourful yet serviceable moquette. Bright-tec LED destination equipment is fitted.

FACT FILE

Chassis/body Optare Solo (integral)
Engine M-B OM904LA 147bhp
Transmission Allison 2000
Seats 26
Spec Wheelchair bay
Supplied by Optare, 0113 264 5182

MERCEDES-BENZ TOURO

FACT FILE

Chassis Integral/Automatic gearbox
Body Mercedes-Benz Touro
First registered April 2003
Owner Ron Dew and Sons of Somersham
Since New
Paid £185,000
Major modifications None
Current mileage/km 196,004km
Mileage in current ownership 196,004km

PROS & CONS

Costs last 12 months:
Total £2,000 parts, plus labour (inc two tyres)
Service interval Five weeks
Major bills (over £100) Two rear tyres, pair of headlamps, air conditioning repair
Average mpg 10.5 mpg
Breakdowns None

- ☺ Loved by passengers
- ☺ Good ride
- ☺ Tinted windows
- ☺ Good access for service
- ☺ Fuel economy
- ☹ Parts prices
- ☹ A few teething problems

Current condition

Panels and bodywork
★★★★★
Panel corrosion

Seats and flooring
★★★★★
Both excellent, with no fade

Driver area
★★★★½
Well-liked by drivers

Engine and gearbox
★★★★½
Good for the mileage

Key

☺ Positive points
☹ Negative points

★★★★★ Excellent
★★★★½ Very good
★★★½☆ Good
★★☆☆☆ Poor
★☆☆☆☆ Very poor

Mercedes is a star performer

Passengers love the luxurious experience and it's a real joy for the drivers, too

Operator's comments: One of two Touros in ownership, this automatic was bought to satisfy the tour programme and private hire. Like many operators, we have to buy with regard to the price, but be mindful of the many long-distance trips we do, so the Touro works for us on two levels. It's a very popular coach with both passengers and drivers, who have taken to the automatic gearbox.

The coach is very imposing, and is definitely a high-spec, heavyweight tourer. As with all our coaches, we've gone for 49 seats and a loo. The vehicle is air conditioned, and the system works very well.

The luggage capacity is peerless, and the appearance impressive. Customers love seeing the three-pointed star; we can't honestly say they ask for a Mercedes but when a group which doesn't know our fleet boards, the badge definitely counts for something.

Driver comment: With plenty of torque, the 362bhp engine makes the driving experience effortless, and the automatic gearbox doesn't let it down. The Touro handles superbly, with very little body roll or sway, and it sticks to the road like glue. On our manual Touro, you have to drive on the rev counter, because the saloon is so quiet, there's little engine note feedback. The auto box does away with this concern.

Top: Imposing vehicle that the passengers love. Above: Comfortable interior. Above left: Seat quality adds to appeal. Above right: They love the Mercedes star logo. Left: comfort for driver, too

MerseyTravel call centre tops survey

The Department for Transport has named Merseytravel's Traveline as Britain's best travel call centre for the fourth year running. It beat 23 other call centres in a "mystery shopper" survey, achieving a maximum score of 100% in several areas including friendliness, politeness, helpfulness, efficiency, clarity, accuracy and call ending.

Merseytravel Chief Executive and Director General, Neil Scales, said: "This is an amazing achievement. There has been a nine per cent increase in call volumes answered in the past year due to a number of factors, including a high volume of bus service changes."

"Despite this increase Traveline has maintained its reputation as the best in the country. We do have some highly sophisticated equipment to help our operators but it is the dedication and enthusiasm of the staff that is of paramount importance."

The Department for Transport twice-yearly survey involves "mystery shoppers" calling for travel advice with the results being gauged on a range of criteria including speed, efficiency, accuracy and courtesy.

The Merseytravel team achieved an overall score of 99% in the latest survey, the highest ever score recorded and the second time Merseyside has achieved it.

Tim Partington, who heads the team and has himself been voted one of the top 10 call centre managers in the country, said: "This has truly been a team effort and I'm proud of everyone involved."

"We do have sophisticated equipment including a journey planning service whereby Traveline can tell you exactly how to get from your front door to anywhere in the UK, what form of transport to use and how long that journey will take.

"But nothing beats local knowledge and the personal touch. All of our team travel round the region on public transport. That way they can familiarise themselves with the routes. This is part of our success"

Traveline Merseyside is open 364 days per year, staffed by 13 full time equivalent and two part time posts. The centre is equipped to handle a wide range of enquiries including National Express, national rail, county bus, rail and ferry information.

Invitation to Tender
Social Services Day Centre Transport

Ealing Council is seeking to invite tenders from suitably qualified and experienced Transport Contractors, to undertake the service of provision of Social Services Day Centre Transport within the London Borough of Ealing. The service will cover various different client groups including Older People, Physically Disabled and Learning Difficulties.

The duration of the contracts will be in the range of three to five years commencing 2nd January 2007.

Applicants who wish to receive the tender documents or have any further queries relating to this contract should contact Jamelia Stewart on stewartj@ealing.gov.uk or tel. 020 8825 9962.

The tender awards criteria will be the most economically advantageous tender in terms of criteria as stated in the tender documents.

Closing date for is Monday 3rd July 2006, Midday.

Notice of this tender was dispatched to the Official Journal of the European Union on 10th May 2006, Ref. 2006/S 90-096612.

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www.ealing.gov.uk

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Please send CV with a covering letter to Philip Peake, Ecodrive Transmission Ltd, 35 Devonshire Road, Oakhill 61 Industrial Estate, Walkden, Manchester, M28 3PT. *Closing date: Friday 30th June.*

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General Manager — Derby

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Closing date: Friday 9th June 2006.

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1991 H REG DENNIS DOMINATOR
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1989 F REG LEYLAND OLYMPIANS
Cummins L10/ZF, Northern Counties semi low height body, 75 seats, large choice

1990 G REG LEYLAND OLYMPIANS,
Gardner 6LXB/ZF automatic, Alexander 76 seat bodies.

1983/4 A/B REG LEYLAND OLYMPIANS,
Gardner 6LXB, ECW 77 seat lowheight bodies, recent retrims.

1990 DENNIS DART,
Cummins/Allison, Carlyle body fitted with Plaxton Pointer front, 28 seats.

1983 LEYLAND TIGERS
Rebodied with East Lancs EL2000 bodies, 55 seaters

1991-92 LEYLAND OLYMPIANS
Cummins L10/ZF, Alexander R type bodies, either 74 seat dual door or 78 single door, large choice

1997 P REG MCW METRORIDER
25 seaters, large selection

1995 M REG VOLVO B6'S,
Volvo engines, ZF gearboxes, Alexander 40-seat bodies, good selection

1999 PP IVECO EURO MIDI
Indcar Maxim, 29 seats, air-con, TV, video, extremely good condition, supplied with new test.

1989 PP DENNIS CONDORS
Gardner/Voith, Duple Metsec bodies, 2 door, 106 seaters

1993 K REG DENNIS DART,
Cummins/Allison, 40 seater, Wrights bodies

1997 P REG VOLVO OLYMPIANS,
Alexander bodies, 2 doors, 68 seats, or can be single doored and upseated to 78

1995 M REG VOLVO OLYMPIAN,
Volvo/Voith, Alexander body, 82 seats , new test.

1990 DENNIS CONDORS,
Arriving now from Hong Kong. Cummins L10 engines, Voith 3 speed auto gearboxes, tinted windows, full air-con throughout, 94 seats with 2 doors or 95 with single door conversion. Refurbished to Firstgroup spec 4 years ago. Limited number available.

1989 G REG LEYLAND OLYMPIANS
Cummins L10/ZF, Northern Counties body, 2 doors, 75 seats

1986 C REG LEYLAND OLYMPIANS
ECW Lowheight bodies, 77 seats, Cummins L10 engines, Voith 4 speed gearboxes (60mph)

1986/7 LEYLAND OLYMPIANS
Gardner/hydracyclic, ECW semi-low height bodies, 68 seats, long tests, some single door, 72 seaters also available

1994 L REG VOLVO
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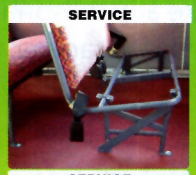

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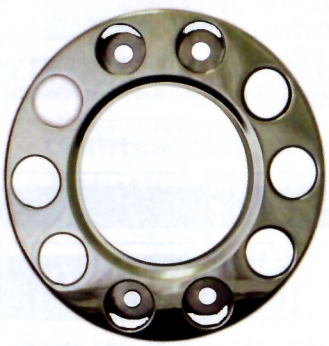

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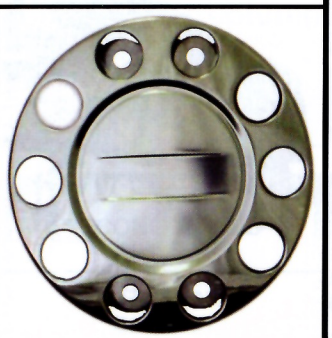

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Seen something funny? Send it to *mark.williams@rouncymedia.co.uk*, fax 0845 2802927 or write to: Last Stop, CBW, 3 The Office Village, Cygnet Park, Hampton, Peterborough PE7 8FD

Reader Alan Nicholls-Tydd sends us these evocative pictures, taken on his travels. A lonely estuary in Donegal, on the north-western tip of Ireland, probably isn't the most obvious place to go bus spotting, but on the wild, wind-swept shores of the waterway are two buses like this one, pressed into service by local fishermen as storage sheds for scallops. "I have to admit a couple of tears were shed when I saw her," says Alan. "But I suppose they have a scenic place for their retirement. The other one on the other side of the estuary was in better condition." Well, it could hardly have been much worse...

EYMS goes thespian

The subject matter of coach drivers obviously struck a chord with East Yorkshire Motor Services when it sponsored a stage production at Hull Truck Theatre.

Men of the World enjoyed a three-week run when the comedy set out to uncover the secret lives of coach drivers on an almost bare stage, with only a pile of suitcases as props. Written by double BAFTA award-winner John Godber, the play centres on Frank, Stick and Harry, just returned from a Rhine Valley tour and about to head for Scarborough.

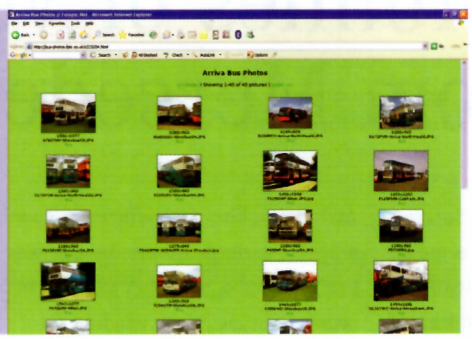
EYMS not only did the usual 'contra' of cross-sponsorship with advertising both on the buses and to coach passengers, gave away a coach holiday and provided a vehicle for the stars to pose aboard, but offered suitable 'real' driving anecdotes to the players.

A Liverpool fan writes...

West Ham manager Alan Pardew offered to send his squad on an expenses-paid holiday to Florida, but they said they'd rather go to Blackpool... so they could see what it's like to ride on an open-top bus. Cruel!

Googled...

http://bus-photos.fpic.co.uk/ Bus enthusiasts have embraced the new digital age with a vengeance, and the evidence of their hard work in cataloguing the nation's vehicles can be found here. No matter which fleet you are interested in, there's probably a picture of its buses available here, and if you want one in its full, high-resolution glory, you can buy a copy. We can't deny there have been times when this site's snappers have saved a news page...



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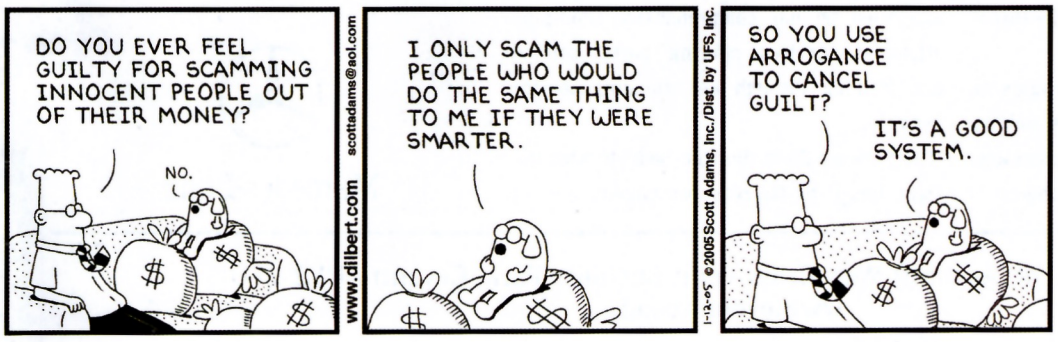
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Two minute interview

Full name Peter Mark Woodhouse
Age 38
Occupation Transport lawyer
Will there be more passengers on coaches and buses in the future? Yes, without a doubt. Although, with the various concessionary fares schemes how much of it will in fact be subsidised by the operators remains to be seen!
If "yes", who will they be, and if "no", why not? Almost certainly in the short term we will have more elderly passengers travelling. In the long term, modal shift is a necessity not an option. That depends on plenty of joined-up thinking.
Which recent legislation has been most irritating or useless? If I had to pick one it would the recent rules on concessionary fares: the fact that schemes can be operating under the Transport Acts 1985 and 2000, that the enforcement mechanisms are different, that there is no clear guidance on when concessions can be refused, that up front the loss falls on the operator and that going forward the situation looks set to get worse!
Give the industry's business managers 25 words of helpful advice. Don't put things off: ie if you put up a fence at the top of the hill you won't need an ambulance at the bottom.
When you got your first job in the industry, was it love at first sight? Hardly! My first transport job was driving a Kwik Fit tyre lorry – with full loading and unloading duties. It was a very long and hot summer!
Which vehicle – coach, bus, motorcycle or car – do you love the most and why? Kit from Knight Rider – if all cars were that clever I'm sure we could claim driving time as rest!

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